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GROWTH OF THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTIANITY.

*In preparation, Third Edition,*

# AIDS TO THE STUDY OF GERMAN THEOLOGY.

BY REV. GEO. MATHESON, M.A.,  
AUTHOR OF 'GROWTH OF THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTIANITY.'

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# GROWTH

OF THE

# SPIRIT OF CHRISTIANITY

FROM THE FIRST CENTURY

TO

THE DAWN OF THE LUTHERAN ERA

BY THE

✓  
REV. GEORGE MATHESON, M.A. B.D.

AUTHOR OF

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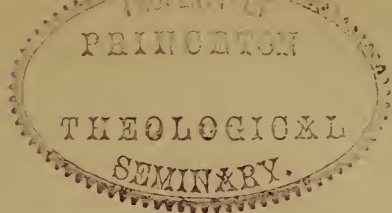
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## ERRATA.

Vol. ii. p. 303, line 6 from foot, *for* 'how' *read* 'now.'

Vol. ii. p. 307, line 11 from foot, *for* 'untutured' *read* 'untutored.'



# THE GROWTH OF THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTIANITY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### ERRATA.

Vol. I., page 5, line 19—*for* 'this very remarkable sentence,' *read* 'the very remarkable suggestion that.'

Vol. I., page 300, line 14—*for* 'Council of Prague,' *read* 'Council of Brague.'

Vol. I., page 302, line 20—*for* 'Council of Prague,' *read* 'Council of Brague.'

Vol. II., page 199, line 12—*for* 'this life,' etc., *read* 'this light,' etc.

...periments of study. For it cannot be denied, that in every subject of investigation we are enclosed between a Scylla and a Charybdis,—are exposed on the one hand to the temptation of over-valuing antiquity, and on the other to the danger of drifting altogether from the moorings which bind us to the ancient landmarks. All men seek a paradise of some sort, but there are some who seek it only in the days that have been, and who would bring back the world to a standpoint which is long surmounted: there are others who search for it entirely in the days that are to be, and cast upon the receding shore a glance

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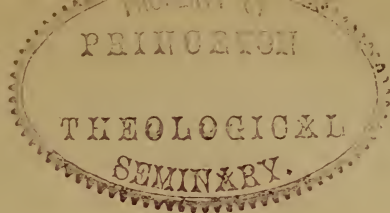
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# THE GROWTH OF THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTIANITY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE ORIGINALITY AND OLDNESS OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

THERE are two opposite tendencies between which the mind of the historian has been ever prone to oscillate,—the undue exaltation of the past, and the unwarrantable depreciation of it. In this respect the historian has been only a part of humanity itself, and has merely followed the bias which pervades all departments of study. For it cannot be denied, that in every subject of investigation we are enclosed between a Scylla and a Charybdis,—are exposed on the one hand to the temptation of over-valuing antiquity, and on the other to the danger of drifting altogether from the moorings which bind us to the ancient landmarks. All men seek a paradise of some sort, but there are some who seek it only in the days that have been, and who would bring back the world to a standpoint which is long surmounted: there are others who search for it entirely in the days that are to be, and cast upon the receding shore a glance



not unmingled with contempt. The former is the tendency of ultra-Catholicism, the latter of extreme negative Protestantism; both are one-sided, and therefore we believe both are erroneous. To each of them there is one common error, and it is this, they both deny the development of history. The Ultramontanist places his paradise in a fixed locality and in a definite time, and says to the course of future ages, 'Hitherto shalt thou go, and no farther.' The negative Protestant denies that man has ever reached his Eden, cuts asunder the ties which connect him with the institutions of the past, and presses forward to the mark of some prize, whose glory is its obscurity in the mists of the future.

Now, against each of these views the scientific historian must protest. He cannot consent to divide the life of the world into the good and the bad ages; to do so would be to admit that a large portion of time had existed for no other purpose than to manifest its own uselessness. We cannot recognise in any province the existence of materials whose design is to be wasted; and therefore we cannot take our stand upon any point of history, and say that all which went before was unworthy to have been.

Not even with Dean Milner can we select a little stream from out the tract of the Middle Ages, and, regarding all around as steeped in corruption, propose to follow exclusively the course of this tiny rivulet. The development of history and the unity of the human race alike forbid us thus to narrow the limits of the mind of man. The Protestant historian has a far nobler ground on which to base the strength



of his position. The world seems ever and anon to be turning new angles, at each of which fresh sunlight streams upon its way. Such a turning-point was that which, beginning with the revival of letters, culminated in the great religious movement which we call the Reformation. We are perfectly conscious, in passing from the fifteenth to the sixteenth century, that we have made a transition into an atmosphere more pure, and into a clime more salubrious. We may not have settled in our own minds the meaning of this momentous fact; we may not have solved the problem whether Luther or Calvin or Zwingli or Schwenkfeld has reached the secret of truth, or whether that truth has been fully attained by any or all of them; but about the fact itself there can be no doubt,—the age of the Reformation is the breath of a higher atmosphere. But are we then to conclude that the past history of the world exhibits twelve centuries of waste? The man is a higher type of humanity than the school-boy; but the school-boy is the father of the man.

The Christian world has also had its school-days, or, as we are accustomed to say, its scholasticism. There are few in our age who would look back with regret upon that scholastic period, or who would desire to live it over again. Yet it would be unjust not to acknowledge, that amidst all its manifold errors it retains some claim upon our gratitude. Christianity in the school is the preparation for Christianity in the world. When a man comes by nature to speak grammatically, he may afford to forget the rules of grammar, just as he may throw

down the ladder when he has reached the desired eminence; yet, in throwing it down, let him not disparage it, nor let him soon forget that it has been the means of his ascent. Christianity, too, may and ought in its maturity to dispense with many of those forms which in earlier days environed it; but let it dispense with them respectfully and reverently, acknowledging their services in the past, even while declining their aid for the future.

Thus far we have intended these remarks to be merely illustrative, the indications of a great principle which lies at the root of all history. We have expressed our conviction that the historical ages of Christianity must be viewed, not as conflicting periods of good and evil, but as the progressive stages of an ever growing life. But now we are about to extend this principle far wider, and to show that there is not only a unity in all the eras of Christianity, but a unity in all the eras of time.

Before the historian of the Church can pass beyond the threshold of his subject, there is a question of momentous interest which he cannot afford to ignore. In recognising the inestimable claims of Christianity to the respect and veneration of mankind, he cannot close his eyes to the fact that it has come into existence at a comparatively late period of this world's history, and that it has been preceded by a multitude of systems, which have successively engrossed the minds of men. With such a fact before him, it will be impossible for him to enter upon the study of Christianity as an isolated phenomenon, standing apart from all beside, and having no relation

to the things around it. He will be forced to ask the same question which, as we have seen, belongs to a study of the Reformation era. What place does it occupy with reference to the ages which have gone before? Are these, too, only a waste of years? The answer to this question has been a long battleground.

It has been too often viewed merely as a field for polemical theology, too seldom as a matter of scientific interest; and the inevitable result has been, that the inquiry has degenerated into a strife of parties.

There are some who have delighted to represent the Christian religion as nothing more than the flower of heathenism,—the latest fruit of a tree which has been ever growing into ripeness. Tindal tells us that the elements of piety and morality are as old as the creation. Bolingbroke declares that the precepts of Christianity are derived from Platonism; and the author of *Ecce Homo* begins his work with this very remarkable sentence, 'Christianity did not begin with Christ.'

At the opposite remove from these there stands another class, with whom heathenism is radically bad, and has no other mission than to deepen, by its contrast, the glory of the light divine. Mr. Hardwicke, in his comparison of Christ and other masters, exults beyond measure in this antithesis. With considerable ability, and with no little research, he has examined one by one the religions of antiquity, but with an aim so manifestly dogmatic, that it vitiates to a great extent the scientific value of his work. In his hands, the religions of heathenism

are presented as a foil to set off by contrast the beauties of the Christian faith; and there is a manifest struggle to deprive these religions of anything which might seem to indicate the earnest search for truth, or the partial attainment of knowledge.

For ourselves, it would be difficult to say which of these conflicting views we would be least disposed to adopt. The acceptance of either exclusively would be a choice of evils. On the one hand, we cannot for a moment believe that the Christian religion is a revolt from all other religions; such a doctrine never found place in the earliest centuries of the Church's history. That Christianity was a reversal of all previous beliefs,—that it was an arrest to the natural development of the human mind,—that it came down unexpectedly and unnaturally, burying under its avalanche every fabric of philosophic thought which had preceded it, was an opinion repudiated by the first centuries of Christendom, and impugned by all who were esteemed in that age the pillars of the new religion. There was indeed one sect which adopted this view—we mean the followers of Marcion; but the followers of Marcion were never recognised as a dominant party in the Church. Within that Church itself there was originally upon this point a general harmony of opinion. Paul, with his wide appreciation of intellectual culture; John, with his not less wide sympathy for the moral wants of humanity; Justin Martyr, baptizing his heathen philosophy into the service of the new light; Tatian, seeming almost to struggle between that life of the world which was dying, and that life which was rising; Irenæus,



bearing far into the West the torch of Christianity ; Clement of Alexandria, succeeding for the first time in presenting to the world the scientific relations which this religion bore to all things ;—these were men widely different in their characteristic features, and by no means equally endowed with the gifts of genius, yet they are all united in regarding the object of their worship as the head of the human race, the centre of human history, and the light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

With Tertullian, at the opening of the third century, we meet for the first time with that sharp separation between nature and grace in which heaven stands over against the earth as its antithesis and as its destroyer, and in which the instincts of the human are presented as things to be crucified ; but as yet this narrowing tendency is limited to the Church of North Africa, and it requires two other centuries to complete the work.

Perhaps with Augustine that work of separation may be considered perfect ; yet even with Augustine there are startling survivals of an older and of a higher culture. If he held the virtues of the heathen to be nothing but splendid vices, he certainly assigned a far nobler place to their speculative thoughts. None has done so much to exhibit the points of union between the religion of Christ and the highest features of those religions which went before Him ; none has succeeded so well in finding for Christianity a meeting-point with the philosophy of Plato. Whatever Augustine may be as a dogmatic theologian, as an intellectual thinker he has a sympathy with the

deepest instincts of human nature ; and the grandest monument to his memory must ever be that he has striven to establish the unity of reason and revelation.

Indeed, the religion of Christ would not have esteemed it a mark of commendation to have been recognised in the world as an altogether new thing. A revelation which was absolutely original would have been absolutely useless. Whatever reveals itself to me must reveal itself to my experience ; and the deeper that experience to which it speaks, the more perfect will be the revelation. The book which reveals most will be that book which awakens most, which stirs up the longest train of memories, which strikes the oldest chord in our nature. The heavens declare the glory of God, but they declare it to the eye, and to more than the eye,—to that sense of beauty which is in the world, but is not of it ; which is aroused by the things without, but belongs itself to the individual soul. The most powerful revelation will be that message which speaks deepest home to all that we have known ; and if Christianity has obtained that pre-eminence, it is because pre-eminently it possesses this quality. Since the days of Gibbon we have heard much of the secondary causes for the propagation of Christ's religion. To our mind, the one secondary cause, if secondary it be, was just that old element which the new religion enshrined within it. When Christianity came, the world recognised it, not instantaneously indeed, but yet with wonderful rapidity ; and the reason of this recognition, apart from its supernatural

power, was the meeting-place it presented to the conflicting views of men. Around this centre the most diverse beliefs could nestle ; Judaism, Orientalism, the features of the Western mythology, and the best elements in all the current systems of philosophy, all rested here. Platonism found a congenial soil in a religion which exalted the unseen and eternal above the seen and temporal. Stoicism found a point of union in a creed which embraced amongst its leading doctrines the all-pervading presence of a divine spirit in the universe. Those votaries who had sought their gods in the likeness of men were naturally attracted by a religion which revealed in one man the divinest perfections which had yet been conceived. The victims of political oppression, who had long dreamed of a Utopian republic, in which the rights of the individual would be commensurate with those of the race, were awakened into something like a hope realized when they beheld overflowing the world a worship whose key-note was brotherhood, whose watchword was self-sacrifice, and whose essence was the communion of soul with soul. A spark had fallen upon all the elements of truth which had been slumbering in the latent depths of religions ready to vanish away, and these elements had caught fire and burst into resurrection flame beneath the kindling touch which had broken their repose.

But this brings us to the other side of the picture ; and while there is another side, it will be impossible to rest here. What is that spark which has thus ignited all the fragments of truth which heathenism contains ? Whatever it be, it must be the new thing

in Christianity, the desideratum which the world waited for, and which the world, with all its wisdom, was not able to create. It may be true—we believe it is true—that the elements of piety and morality are as old as the creation, but the elements of piety and morality would never make a pious man. The elements of the human body are as old as the creation, for these are particles of matter, and therefore have existed from the beginning. But would any man say that the possession of all these particles, or even the power to combine them in their definite and normal proportions, would ever enable us to construct an active organism? It is manifest that, to accomplish such a task, we would need to have something before the elements,—the vital force itself, whatever that be, and wherever it be seated. Nor does it seem to us that there is any essential difference as regards the spiritual world. It may be conceded that the knowledge of right and wrong belongs to man's original creation; it may be conceded that we have evidence of such a knowledge in the speculative works of the heathen philosophers; but where this concession ends, Christianity begins.

In the intellectual speculations of antiquity we discover, indeed, the presence of materials which might be moulded into a grand moral life; but these materials exist rather as great possibilities than as realized facts; there is plenty of fuel, but no fire. It is patent on the very surface of history, and will not, we think, be denied, even by the opponents of dogmatic Christianity, that the heathen world never attained to the practical height of the modern one. We admit



at once that there are moral sayings of the old philosophers which are not surpassed by anything in later times,—we are not even quite sure if Christendom has not exchanged the vices of the heathen world for an equal number of vices more adapted to its advanced civilisation ; but, when all this is said, there is something which remains behind. There is a life in Christendom which is not in heathendom, and that life unconsciously manifests itself in that which is the gospel's very root and glory—unselfishness.\*

There is one feature in which Christianity will look in vain for a parallel in pre-Christian times,—we mean the display of practical benevolence, the helpfulness of man for man. The ancient world had no place for sorrow ; even the Jewish world looked upon suffering as the mark of divine reprobation ; and if a nation so high in its moral aspirations could thus judge, is it surprising that those nations to whom beauty was dearer than morality should judge more harshly still ? The religions of antiquity, with such exceptions as shall be afterwards mentioned, deified strength. To them, the great man was the brave man, and the brave man was the man of brute courage. Everywhere the physical dominated the spiritual.

The heathen devotee would have shrunk from imputing to his highest gods any defect in personal appearance, or any deficiency in the exercises of muscular vigour. But he would not have shrunk

\* In making the gospel distinctively the introduction of an unselfish principle, we do not mean that the historical act of redemption was a mere manifestation of self-sacrifice. Throughout this whole work we are considering, not the historical act, which belongs to dogmatic theology, but purely the life or spirit which that act generated.

from imputing to them some of the grossest vices of humanity,—malice, and hatred, and envy, and all uncharitableness. The heathen devotee in this was quite consistent with himself; he gave to his gods those qualities which he esteemed the most beautiful, and to him physical power was all-beautiful. That there might exist a transcendent strength, not only in union with physical weakness, but as the very result of that weakness,—that there might be exhibited in the suffering of pain and privation a nobler heroism than that of Mars or Hercules, never entered into the calculations of the greater part of pre-Christian worshippers. We said, indeed, we should notice exceptions, but this is assuredly the rule. Accordingly, the practical life of that old world was the legitimate fruit of the tree. It was emphatically a world for the strong, for the opulent, for the powerful; but it had no room for the weak, the destitute, the infirm. It had no house of refuge for the homeless, no infirmaries for the sick, no hospitals for the incurables. Nor can it be averred that this deficiency was the offspring of primitive barbarism. There are many respects in which the civilisation of the moderns has not outgrown that of the ancients; some, perhaps, in which it still lags behind. If the highest product of civilisation be the perfection of art, then the world of heathenism cannot attribute its moral inabilities to the defect of its culture. The truth is, we must look elsewhere for an explanation of the old world's callousness to the impressions of sorrow. It seems to us that the practical defect was the result of a religious one.

Amidst all that undoubtedly was great and true in its gropings after the Infinite, there was one idea which it never dreamed of associating with infinitude,—the idea of the cross, of suffering, of limitation. It would have deemed it impiety to have contemplated the Divine Spirit in union with lowly circumstances or in connection with outward weakness; it deified the strong, and it identified the strong with the physically powerful. It had no place for a cross in the world, because it had no place for a cross in the thought of God. *There* was the defective element in the religions of heathenism.

Now the supply of this deficiency is the new thought of Christianity, the point which distinguishes that religion from all which went before. There are many things which it holds in common with them, but it possesses this in contrast to them. And what renders this contrast the more forcible, is the fact that in Christianity the divine nature of sacrifice is not so much a speculative idea as a practical power,—an actual life which has been lived in the world, and which has communicated itself to the world. The new religion did not at first present itself as a system of doctrines, nor did it originally appeal to the intellect in any form. It did not seek to stimulate the imagination, and it only addressed the senses with reluctance, and as it were, under protest. Its earliest mission was to the heart, and it reached the heart in the only way in which it can be reached—by proving its doctrines to be a life-reality, by exhibiting them in the form of an actual existence. The power of the gospel was primarily

the power of a new vitality; the enthusiasm which it kindled lay in the conviction it inspired, that the divine life might repeat itself in the breast of all humanity, and that the disciple might in some measure be partaker with the Master. It was this which in the early centuries of the Christian Church produced such examples of heroic devotion, and caused many to seek for martyrdom with more eagerness than the poet for fame, or the soldier for conquest. Christianity had reversed the standard of heroism: it had made that weak which had once been strong; it had rendered that strong which was wont to be weak. The virtues to which it pointed as the highest marks of glory, were precisely those which the old world had despised: poverty of spirit, meekness, endurance of persecution, forgiveness of injuries, the returning of good for evil,—these were amongst the elements which in the heart of the Christian constituted the ideal of true greatness. Every valley had been exalted, and every mountain had been brought low; for all that was great, in the new light became lowly, and all that once was mean became surpassingly great. Christianity selected as the symbol of its glory, not a crown, but a cross; and ever since, that symbol has continued to be the distinguishing badge of the religion, its motto, its watchword, its motive and its goal in one.

And now let us gather up in a single sentence the result of this brief inquiry. We have seen that Christianity is in one sense allied to the religions which preceded it, that in another sense it stands apart from them. There is in it something which is

old, and something which is new; that which is old unites it to the past, that which is new points it to the future. The old element may be called the secondary cause of its progress, for thereby it found a meeting-place with the instincts of mankind; the new element must be regarded as its supernatural force, for it is nothing less than the imparting of a higher life to the world. At this stage, then, there rise into view two problems which must not be overlooked: the first centres around the question, How was the heathen world related to the new element in Christianity? and the second is occupied with the inquiry, How did Christianity appropriate to itself the kindred elements of the old religions? Here, then, is the work before us for the next two chapters. We shall first consider the preparation for the cross, and we shall afterwards advert to that wonderful ingathering, by which all that was great and good in the systems of antiquity was taken up into the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.



## CHAPTER II.

### PREPARATION FOR THE CROSS.

IT is not our intention, as it is not our province, to describe, even in outline, the religions of antiquity. This has been done in detail repeatedly and exhaustively, and we have no facts to communicate which are not already familiar to most readers. We shall therefore, in great measure, assume that the facts are well known to the historical inquirer, and shall exhibit only so much of them as may illustrate our present purpose. That purpose is to follow briefly the course of the old world's religious development, with a view to discover whether there can be found in it any premonitions of the new light which is to dawn. The preparation for the cross is perhaps the only branch of the subject which has not received much attention, and in which the field is comparatively free.

It has been customary to seek for parallels between heathenism and Christianity, and these parallels have generally been found in such doctrines as the Trinity and the Incarnation. Yet neither the doctrine of the Trinity, nor that of the Incarnation, expresses the deepest essence of the Christian religion; there is something which lies beneath both, and that is the idea of the cross. We have stated our conviction

that the notion of divine sacrifice is the element in Christianity which is distinctively new ; and if it be so, it is to this goal that all premonitions must point, and all anticipations direct. Perhaps it may be well, first, to ask whether we should expect to find such a preparation in the religions of the old world. If the idea be a new one, would it not be more natural to suppose that it would be allowed to rest in latency until the human mind was ripe for its reception ? But whether this be or be not according to natural expectation, it is certainly not in accordance with the analogy of facts. We find through the whole course of history, that wheresoever any great change passes over the nature of things, it has always been preceded by certain premonitory symptoms, which, to a far-seeing intelligence, would have inevitably revealed its coming. In some instances, indeed, these symptoms have not been discovered at the time—they have only come into view with the light thrown back upon them by the actual catastrophe ; but this does not affect the principle, it only indicates the limited nature of man's vision. In all great changes there is something more than was foreseen ; yet, when this new element appears, we find that the minds of men, while not foreseeing it, have nevertheless been unconsciously maturing for it. We shall have repeated reason to observe this in the course of our historical survey ; but, in the meantime, let us just consider whether it does not lie on the very threshold of the subject. Did the world of heathenism receive any preparatory training for this great thought of divine sacrifice ?

In tracing the stream of these pre-Christian re-



ligions, do we find that in its course it seems to wind nearer to this appointed spot for the meeting of the nations? In attempting an answer to this question, we are confronted by two preliminary difficulties. We are first naturally led to ask, Where does the stream begin? and to this inquiry we find it impossible to obtain a reply. We cannot, of course, believe that those fragments of truth which we now see scattered up and down throughout the Gentile nations were always thus fragmentary and isolated. It seems impossible to avoid the conclusion, that what now exists in separation existed once in unity, and that the religions of heathenism form but the disjointed parts of a great original religion, which was impressed at the beginning upon the soul of man.

The account of the Jewish records seems, after all, the most philosophical that has yet been given. These records tell us that the human race was originally in possession of a divine revelation, and formed one united family blended together by one common faith; that there came a time when the religious life of the world declined, and when men began to think no longer in unity; that from this difference of religious belief there sprang a difference of language, and that the diversity of tongues produced the diversity of nations. Such is the account of the matter given by the book of Genesis, and it has obtained the approval and support of so impartial a judge as Schelling. This philosopher holds emphatically, that before separate nations can be formed the unity of language must be broken, and that men will cease to speak one

common language when they have ceased to hold one common religion. A similar testimony to the original unity of mankind is borne by the learned Schlegel. Man in his perfection exhibits the balance of all mental powers; reason, imagination, understanding, and will are united in their due proportions, and exist in absolute harmony. The fall brings discord into human nature, it separates the faculties of the soul, and divides them between different nations: reason is given to China, imagination to India, understanding to Egypt, and will to Persia. With Greece there begins the reconciliation of that which was destroyed; and at length in Christianity the reconstruction is complete, and the human race resumes its original position as a united and harmonious family.

The speculations of philosophy, coinciding as they do with the main features of the Mosaic narrative, must, in any case, tend to foster the respect of the historian for a work at once so old and yet so anticipative of the new; nor does there seem, on grounds of reason, to exist any objection to that time-honoured belief, that the religions were once one faith. But beyond this we cannot go. We ask in vain where first this unity existed, and when first this unity was broken. The progress of the world, like the progress of the sunlight, seems to be from east to west; but whenever we attempt to give definite shape to our conjectures, we are landed in contradiction and confusion. The fountainhead of the stream of nations lies behind history. It can be approached only as an object of religious or of philosophic faith. The mists

of a far antiquity, the absence of historical records, and the conflicting statements of those mythologies which have striven to fill up the blank, have contributed as effectually as the Cherubim and the flaming sword to bar the advance of knowledge to the cradle of life.

But there is a second preliminary difficulty, and one nearer home. Leaving the fountainhead altogether out of account, can we trace any part of the stream at all? If we take the heathen world as we find it, exhibiting the fragments of truth and revealing the scattered rays of a sun that has set, is there any method by which we can arrange these fragments, and trace their order in the history of the world? To which of these Gentile nations shall we give the pre-eminence in time, or on what principle shall we determine that pre-eminence? Shall we assign them an antiquity proportionate to their own claims? Unfortunately, they each and all of them claim an indefinite duration. China aspires to an immense antiquity, and Hegel has placed its empire chronologically the first. India has even more to show in support of its pretensions, for its sacred writings seem to extend into the very mists of the past. Egypt has a table of sovereigns which, if genuine, would carry back its history into a region commensurate with the requirements of Mr. Darwin and Sir Charles Lyell. Between these claimants history cannot decide, and therefore some other umpire must be found. The only available umpire is religion, yet it is not the special province of religion to determine the priority of nations. While, therefore, we avail ourselves of its testimony, we must be careful not to speak dogmatically in a sphere where

it claims no infallible authority. Thus far, however, we are entitled to go: we know that the religions of the old world admit of being arranged progressively, that they do not all exhibit the same degree of light, and that in some we find a much closer approximation to the Christian idea than in others. In the absence, therefore, of any historical evidence to the contrary, it seems not unnatural to suppose that those forms of belief which have least affinity with the Christian faith are farthest removed from it in time, and that those religions which admit more easily of a Christian application come nearest to that standpoint where the world renews its youth. Accordingly, having no better means of determining this question, we shall adopt the principle here indicated, and shall regulate the claims of the nations in accordance with the development of their religious belief.

Considered from this point of view, there can be no doubt that Hegel is right in placing the empire of China first in the historical series, for the character of the Chinese worship seems at best to be only one degree removed above fetishism. It was for a long time supposed that the inhabitants of China were atheists; this, however, is now known to be a mistake. Its religion was first a political creed, then a philosophic dogma; and lastly, in what is called Chinese Buddhism, it expressed the voice of the people. But into these stages we enter not; there is one feature common to them all. Every nation has had its own notion of the Infinite, its own ideal of what a supreme being should be. The Chinese idea of infinitude is that of absolute move-

lessness, of steadfastness amidst the changeful, of rest breathless and unbroken. The whole worship of the empire centres in the adoration of one attribute—immutability. That which advances with the years, that which varies with the seasons, that which alters with the circumstances of life, is to this worship undivine and unworthy of reverence. Personality is changeful, therefore God cannot be personal; history is changeful, therefore God cannot manifest Himself in the course of history: He is that which underlies all events, and remains unaffected by them all,—that which abides at the root of all creation, and yet refuses to share in the life of created forms. And, in strange consistency with this creed, the inhabitants of this empire have beheld their deity presenting through the long centuries a barrier to all progress, social and national; closing the gates against every intruder from without, lest along with him there should enter some rays of European light; and denying to other lands that privilege of free commercial intercourse which is certain, sooner or later, to bring refinement in its train. There he stands, breasting the waves of progress, claiming the old as his prerogative, and denying the justice of the new. And most wonderfully faithful have his votaries been to his precepts. If it is a common error with mankind to divorce the life of religion from the life of the present, the error of China has been the opposite extreme. Its religion inculcates the belief that God has only the one attribute of immutability, and its practice, in harmony with its faith, has striven after the immutability of man. To speak of the history



of China is almost a misnomer ; for that which resists progress, and struggles to preserve for ever the present hour, must exhibit the stagnation of national life and the barrenness of national annals.

Now we need not say that the Chinese idea of God stands at the utmost possible distance from the Christian element of divine sacrifice. Christianity, indeed, adheres emphatically to the belief in a God who is immutable ; but the immutability which it recognises as divine is not the changelessness of action, but the changelessness of principle. Immutability, in the Christian sense, is the changelessness of a love which, while it ever freshly manifests itself, can never diminish in intensity : immutability, in the Chinese sense, is the movelessness which in popular language we attach to a rock, or a hill, or a block of marble—the rest which thinks not, speaks not, breathes not. In this latter view there is no place in the divine nature either for joy or for sorrow, for pleasure or for pain. The symbol of Christianity is a cross, the transition through suffering into rest : the symbol of the religion of China is its own emperor, who represents to the national vanity the nearest approach which man can make to the image of changelessness,—the aspect of a power too great to admit of increase, and too strong to suffer diminution. In this system sacrifice is not divine.

If every extreme opinion which permeates the spirit of any age is to be regarded as the reaction from some equally extreme tendency on the other side, then does the religion of India flow directly from that of China. Here also we discover three distinct forms ; but we

are discussing at present, not the form, but the spirit, and we find that the same spirit pervades them all. It would be difficult to meet with a contrast more marked and striking than that which distinguishes the religious beliefs of India and of China. China deified immutability; India deified change: to the former, the most sacred thing in the universe was the rest of moveless apathy; to the latter, the most glorious manifestation of a divine nature was the restlessness of eternal movement. For be it observed, that the object which India worshipped was not so much the change as the act of changing. The life of Brahm is a great sleep until his incarnations come; but then he awakes and flashes out into the universe, dividing his life between myriad forms only to receive it back again into himself, receiving it back into himself only to divide it into myriad forms again. That Brahm should rest in any one of these forms would be an impossibility. Such a conception would have falsified the national idea of man and the national idea of God. The Hindoo estimate of divine glory was not that of something fully manifested, it was not that of something which ever could be fully manifested; it was an eternal becoming, a perpetual change, an endless transition. The Hindoo estimate of man was like that of the divine nature,—not a perfected splendour, but a growth from glory to glory; it might even be from meanness to glory. Humanity was divided into different castes, each rising above the other in the gradation of its perfections, and he who discharged well the obligations of the one was permitted to pass at death into the rank of the next



succeeding stage; until at last, having reached the fulness of his being, his individual nature was absorbed in the divine, and the scattered drops of his existence were submerged again in the waters of the mighty sea.

Now it cannot be denied that in the religion of India we have reached one step nearer than that of China to the spirit of Christianity,—have gained one stage in our advance to the idea of the cross. The God of India is no longer a mere impassive being, no longer an inert and motionless existence, incapable of revealing himself, and separated from the permutations of his works. On the contrary, he is now recognised as a perpetual revelation; ever speaking, yet never speaking precisely the same thing; ever changing, yet resting not a moment in his changes. A life which is constantly active is nearer to personality than a life which is perpetually still; yet Brahminism has even more to show. Here, for the first time, we meet with that idea which in Christianity has found so splendid a realization,—the incarnation of the divine in the human, God manifest in the flesh. If Brahminism had carried out that thought to its legitimate issue, it might have anticipated the spirit of Christianity and prophesied the cross; for does not incarnation involve a cross? does it not imply the limiting of an infinite nature, and can such a limitation exist unaccompanied by suffering? But Brahminism did not carry out the idea; it was terrified by its own boldness, it was afraid of the very consequence which would have exalted its speculations. And so, on the very threshold of a great truth, Brahminism drew back, and relinquished the search just when the gold

was at hand. It had given to its deity an incarnation in humanity, but it could not allow him a permanent humanity. His life in man must be consistent with his life everywhere else,—a series of restless flashes, appearing in one form only to pass instantaneously into another ; bursting forth into a blaze of glory, and then immediately sinking into darkness, to rise and sink once more in the temple of some other life. The religion of India beheld its God ever about to come, but never coming ; touching from time to time the very confines of the earth, and then, as it were, by a capricious change of purpose, vanishing from soul and sense into the region of his own mysterious existence.

And now the world is growing weary of this unrest, and it is that helpless weariness which brings despair. In all the grandeur of this Brahminical creed there was yet wanting some place of sure anchorage for the heart of man. The deity whom the human soul beheld was but a vanishing spectre, which mocked the eye by the appearance of a nearness which vanished with the approach of the longing worshippers. Brahminism was the child of unrest, and it could not rise higher than its source. It was impossible that, by a series of airy apparitions, this religion could satisfy the mind of man ; it was a desert place, which ever and anon displayed what seemed in the distance a refreshing stream, but proved in proximity to be only a mirage. And so there was unrest everywhere ; men found that they had lost their way, and they lost at the same time all hope of ever finding it. They could not continue to worship that which was sea

without shore ; and as no land appeared on any side, they gave up worshipping altogether.

Hence we have now reached a form of belief which is conspicuous by its negations,—which denies God, denies immutability, denies even the rights of individual life. That belief is Buddhism. It rose in the very home of the old Indian religion. Nor was it inconsistent that it should do so ; unrest must ever be the parent of anarchy. Yet let us be just to Buddhism. If it was essentially a sceptical tendency, it was not the scepticism of intellectual pride ; it sprang rather from intellectual humility. It was the product, not of human nature exulting in its strength, but of human nature weighing itself in the balance and finding itself wanting ; in a word, it was the offspring of despair. It abandoned as untenable all the creeds which had gone before it ; it dismissed as illusory all the speculations which had hitherto engaged the minds of men. Beyond this scene of things it could perceive nothing, and within this scene of things it could perceive nothing good. Accordingly, it proposed to accept as its creed the despair of all things. Everything pointed against the realization of individual happiness ; why, then, should the individual struggle against this decree of nature ? Let him yield to the inevitable law ; let him sacrifice himself to the interests of the whole. The life of each man is but a drop in the ocean, and it is a drop of misery ; the only blessedness which can befall him is the loss of that life, the extinction of this restless individual being which is ever striving for independence, and whose strivings are the source of its sorrows. Hence on the ruins of all religious

faith, Buddhism has striven to build a morality to which the world had hitherto been a stranger,—a morality whose essence is self-sacrifice, and whose goal is the abandonment of personal happiness.

It appears at first sight to present a startling parallel to those precepts which proceeded directly from the inspiration of the cross, and it certainly forms a very prominent exception to that tendency of the old world which deified strength more than goodness. Here for the first time self-sacrifice is ennobled ; and we seem to have reached already the forecast shadows of the promised land. But if our earliest impression is the closeness of the parallel between the morality of Buddhism and the morality of the cross, our second impression is the wideness of their contrast. In Christianity, self-sacrifice is divine ; in Buddhism, it is purely human, and proposed as the substitute for a religion. In Christianity, self-sacrifice is proclaimed to be the source of the highest ultimate joy ; in Buddhism, it is offered as a means of suicide. In Christianity, self-sacrifice contemplates the amelioration of the world ; in Buddhism, it contemplates getting out of the world. The Buddhist accepts the cross as a last resource ; despair is too strong for him, and he wants to end his misery by sinking into individual torpor. He will gladly lay down his life ; but his deepest motive is not the love of his brother, but the conviction that life itself is not worth having. Does not such a conviction destroy the very spirit of sacrifice which it has been powerful in creating ? To part with that which we value not, is surely not the standard of the highest self-denial. The morality

of Buddhism, beautiful as it is in its outward precepts, is still the product of a root of bitterness, and owes its existence to the despair of all rest.

But it is not long before the human mind is seen awakening to a more healthy tone. Admitting that there exists an unrest, there are manifestly two ways of dealing with it; the one is the submission of despair, the other is the investigation of its source. We have seen the former of these in Buddhism; we go on now to see the latter in Parsism. Even despair cannot last for ever; if it end not in death, it must end in reaction, for there is only a certain amount of sorrow which the human heart can hold. Parsism starts with Buddhism from the feeling of unrest, but there their roads diverge and separate for ever. Instead of yielding itself up to the yoke of a despairing servitude, Parsism purposed to trace the root of the evil. In that attempt it partially succeeded and partially failed; but apart altogether from either its success or its failure, the attempt was an honest one, and indicated at least that the human mind had attained to something higher than despair. Parsism said, 'If there be unrest in the world, there must be a cause for it, and the discovery of that cause is the duty which lies before every man. Before we can find the remedy, we must touch the source of the disease.' Was it not manifest that, if unrest were so radically implanted in man's nature, there must be something wrong in this universe? Was it not manifest that, if there be something wrong in the universe, it must be in some opposition to the will of its Creator and Governor? Did it not prove beyond all question that



his power must be circumscribed by some other power? And so Parsism, proceeding to reason from these premisses, denied that there could be only one God in nature. There must clearly be two great principles from which all things flow,—the one the source of light, and the other the origin of darkness; the one the giver of all good, and the other the foundation of every evil; the one destined at last to burst forth in victorious brightness, yet the other able to retard for a time that triumph which must surely come.

Such was the creed of Parsism; a theology scientifically impossible, yet morally suggestive. It expressed at least a nearer preparation for the cross than the old world had hitherto attained; for in this religion there begins to dawn, dimly it may be, erringly and imperfectly we doubt not, yet withal sincerely and truly, a conviction of moral evil. Neither the religion of China, nor the worship of India, nor the self-sacrificing creed of Buddhism, had ever opened up to the heart of man any clearer perception of the horror of sin. In Parsism for the first time the human soul awakens to the cause of its own unrest, and finds the secret of its unhappiness to be its absence from the fountain of light. And who shall say that there is not here a closer approximation to the Christian standpoint than the world had yet achieved? If the leading aim of Christianity be the redemption from sin, the best preparation for Christianity must be the realization of sin; and any religion which contains within itself the germ of this awakening to the intensity of moral evil, has reached at

least one round of the ascending ladder, and is not far from the kingdom of God.

And now let us ask a question which has been asked by many before us. Was it at this time, and from amidst these Parsee worshippers, that it pleased the Infinite Wisdom to call into a new and higher life that native of Ur of the Chaldees who was destined to be the father of a great multitude? Was it at this stage that Abraham went forth from the land of his birth in search of a better country, and in pursuance of a higher destiny? Was it now that the world received that earliest breath of a mighty spiritual life, which has never paused through all the centuries, but has gone on ever growing, ever gathering strength, ever moulding more and more the lives of individuals and of nations? That this period was its beginning has been held by Jewish tradition, and the notion is sanctioned by many considerations in the philosophy of human development. If it be so, then at this epoch of the world's history a stream broke away from the ocean of heathenism, which never came back to it again, but which thenceforth was diverted into a new channel, and wandered towards a mightier sea.

In Judaism, the sense of moral evil, which had begun gradually to appear in the religion of the Parsee, bursts forth with transcendent power, and man at last fully awakens to the recognition of the secret of unrest in the perception of a violated moral law. Here, for the first time, there breaks upon the soul the awful distance implied in these words, finite and infinite. God is no longer a being who reveals Him-



self ; He is the self-existent, self-contained, self-sufficing Jehovah, dwelling far apart from the possibility of communion with His creatures, and speaking to them only through the medium of prophet or angel. Nor is it merely a separation of nature that Judaism recognises between the human and the divine. To this natural division there has been added a source of alienation which is more powerful still. Man has violated the moral law ; that law demands absolute perfection, and there is not an act of the human soul in which there lurks not imperfection. The question of Judaism is repeated again and again in ever recurring forms, but with never varying import,—“Who shall abide in Thy tabernacle ?” It is only another way of asking the solution of that tremendous problem, the union of the finite and the infinite ; except that here the problem is made far more tremendous, when, in addition to the infinite and the finite, we have the Maker and the violator of moral law.

Judaism, for the first time, beheld an averted God, —a Being who had found His creation inadequate to realize His grand ideal. The distance which a violated law had interposed between the creature and the Creator was so great that the very name of God became a symbol of terror, and was never uttered without reluctance. The worshipper could no longer approach in his own strength ; he required the aid of a human mediator : he himself could only stand in the outer court of the tabernacle, while the high priest performed his oblations in the inner recess of the sanctuary. Hence, while in one sense Judaism was

the best preparation for Christianity, in another sense it was more remote from the reception of it than even the Gentile nations. It had awakened deeply to the conviction of sin, and this was itself a ripening for the cross ; yet the very depth of his awakening made it difficult, if not impossible, for the Jew to realize the idea of redemption. Indeed, it would seem as if he had almost given up the hope of an individual reconciliation between God and man. That to which the Jew looked forward was the emancipation of his country. He felt that no single life could keep the law, but that the united life of the nation might do so, each man supplying what was lacking in his brother. And so it was to national rather than to individual purity that he looked for deliverance. He had the expectation of an exalted being, who in the golden future would bring to the name of Israel a glory which it never yet had known ; but even here he contemplated rather a national than an individual glory. His Messiah was not so much for the labouring and heavy-laden man, as for the labouring and heavy-laden nation. The conquests of that Messiah were anticipated as the conquests of physical heroism, and the demolition of a city wall was regarded as a more glorious victory than the destruction of that middle wall of partition which shut out the human from the divine. And the reason of the choice is plain ; the physical triumph was a national act, and could only be accomplished by the united nation. The reconciliation of God with man was a process for the individual soul, and therefore it was outside the genius of the Jewish economy. In the nature of this

religion there was as much to repel as to attract the spirit of Christianity.

In the meantime, the heathen world went on theorizing. The sense of sin was here less strong, and therefore the difference was less marked between the human and the divine. And very strange are some of those theories, displaying, amidst much that is grotesque, much that is the counterfeit of some great though latent truth, and which seems already to anticipate the advent of the coming light.

In Phœnicia, we have the worship of Adonis. A father, inconsolable for the loss of his dead child, sets up his image as an object of adoration. Have we not here another remarkable instance of the occasional tendency to revolt from the old world's standpoint? Strength has for the present ceased to be the thing most admired in the universe, and the eye for a moment has rested with homage on the spectacle of pain.

In Egypt, we find the worship of Isis and Osiris; Isis being the earth, and Osiris the sun. The setting of the sun is represented as the death of Osiris, and the desolation of the earth as the weeping of Isis, his bride. Here, although we have nothing more than the personification of an image in material nature, we find again the appropriation of sorrow as a possible experience of a divine being. But perhaps the feature of the Egyptian worship which most strikingly illustrates this is the adoration of the Sphinx; a creature composed of two natures,—the upper part being human, and the lower portion the body of an animal. And the meaning of this allegory is not

difficult to read. It evidently indicates that the human mind is beginning at last to perceive its own dignity in creation, and is seeking through the force of that perception to emancipate itself from the bondage which has long enslaved it. Nor does it less clearly indicate the manner in which alone this emancipation can be effected. It is the symbol of struggle. There are discerned two parts of our nature,—the one pointing upwards, and the other cleaving to the earth; the one dissatisfied with the present, and the other finding its home amidst the seen and temporal. The redemption of the soul is conceived to be its liberation from that earthly nature which enchains it; and before any such liberation can be achieved, the higher and the lower life must meet in deadly conflict. Here, under a figure whose full meaning was perhaps invisible even to itself, heathenism has anticipated at least one of the leading principles of Christian truth, when it has awakened to that experience which was so amply verified by a future leader of Christianity: ‘The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh.’

And now, man having exalted himself in Egypt, deifies himself in Greece. After the lapse of long centuries, the position of the old world has at last reversed itself. In the days when Buddhism ruled the thoughts of men, we found the human soul in the valleys of despair; we find it now on the very summit of the mountain of hope, confident in its own strength, and beholding in everything the promise of its continued greatness. In Greece, for the first time, we reach the complete appropriation of that thought

which was afterwards so grandly realized in the Christian religion,—the incarnation of God in humanity. We have seen how India touched the verge of this idea, and all but made it its own; yet there the incarnations were transient, and came only to vanish away. But here at last we have a permanent indwelling; the gods are conceived as inhabiting the forms of men, and as mingling in the pursuits and avocations of the human race.

Of course the difference between these incarnations and that of Christianity is far more marked than the resemblance. The idea which Greece contemplated was not so much the stooping of the divine to the human, as the exaltation of the human into the divine; not so much the thought of God becoming man, as the vision of man becoming God. Human nature was still looked upon as something to be vanquished, superseded, overcome; and the earthly heroes who were dignified with the attributes of divinity obtained that dignity by surrendering every part of their being which exhibited finite affection. Yet, when all this is conceded, we must still accord to Greece the honour of having been the first to grasp the possibility of a permanent union between the human and the divine. Imperfect as was the attempt, and one-sided as was its execution, it was yet in aim, at least, a step in the right direction and a march nearer to the goal. The great defect of Greece was that it made the attempt too soon. It sought a union between God and man without first seeking a separation between man and sin. Greece is here at the opposite pole from Judea. In Judea,



the sense of sin was so great that no union was deemed possible; in Greece, the sense of sin was so small that a union of God and man was regarded as easy.

But now, by one of those strange vicissitudes in whose very strangeness there is method, it so happened that the two nations and the two religions the most unlike in all the world were brought side by side. Indeed, the whole world was gathering fast into unity, and this itself was the evident preparation for a change. It will be found throughout the course of history, that wheresoever an advancement is anticipated in the religious thought of man, there is a gradual concentration of the nations into one common focus. At the period of the Reformation, the whole continent of Europe may be said to have been governed by two despotic sovereigns, the King of France and the Emperor of Germany, and to one or other of these the balance ever inclined. And so, as Christianity drew near, there seemed ever increasingly to be an anticipation of the prophetic vision, 'There shall be no more sea,' for all the nations which had been held apart came flocking into one. Greece, under the victorious arms of Alexander, subdued not only Syria and Egypt, but even Judea itself; and thus under one government were blended the two most opposite religions,—that which held God to be incapable of union, and that which believed Him to be ever united with man. Nor was it possible that such an amalgamation could fail to be beneficial to both. Judea gave to Greece something of that deep sense of transgression which constituted the very



essence of its religion ; Greece gave to Judea something of that thought of divine nearness which made the incarnation of God in humanity ever a possible event. Hence in the last days of the old world there arose, under the teaching of Philo, a religion which was at the same time a philosophy,—a religion which, in its speculations after God, did not altogether forget the needs of man. Here, as in the ordinary mythology of Greece, there is recognised the possibility of a God manifest in the flesh, but at the same time, in accordance with the spirit of Judea, there is discovered a hindrance to His perfect manifestation. There is something which must be overcome ere the light can break in its full splendour, and that retarding element belongs to the nature of man. Philo placed the root of sin in matter, and in this respect he weakened his own estimate of its power ; nevertheless, in opposition to the common tendency of the Greek mind, he considered the influence of sin to be a barrier to divine communion. Accordingly, the incarnation of God in humanity must now be effected through a mediator. Thus wonderfully near have we come to the spirit of the cross. And when we consider the language in which this mediator is described, we seem almost already to have entered the precincts of the Christian temple. Whether Philo regarded him as a person or merely as an influence, is a point which has often been disputed, and which will probably never be settled ; but it is beyond all dispute that he lavished upon him nearly every epithet which we are accustomed to associate with the name of Christianity's divine Founder. He calls him the Word, the Son,

the Only-begotten Son, the High Priest, the Archangel, the Mediator, the Door, the Light of the World, the Brightness of the Father.

To some, the resemblance between this language and that of the New Testament has presented itself in a startling form, as if it weakened the originality of the Christian writings ; to us it has a totally different significance. We see in it only another instance of that wondrous adaptation by which the religion of Christ has sought a point of union with the natural instincts of the human soul. When Christianity came into the world, it adopted the language of the world. It had no objection to those names which man had given to God ; it was quite willing that man should retain the old name, provided he had a clearer view of the object which he designated. What the Gentile apostle said to the Athenians, was what the sacred writings virtually said to the whole pre-Christian world : ' Him whom ye ignorantly worship, declare I unto you.' Much of their language was already familiar to the ears on which it fell ; nearly all the terms under which they described divine things had been long in use either in Judea or amongst the Gentile nations. The fatherhood of God, the existence of an only-begotten Son, the incarnation of God in humanity, and the necessity of a regeneration in the life of the soul, were all well-known expressions to the world before the cross. But with the identity of expression the similarity ended. The religion of the cross adopted the current language, both of Jew and Gentile ; and in this it revealed its wisdom, for thereby it obtained a common

meeting-ground on which it could speak to surrounding nations. But while Christianity adopted the old names, it deepened all their meanings. The divine fatherhood, which is the same in sound, is no longer the same in essence with that of Judaism, for the cross has imparted to it a higher element, and has expanded benevolence into self-surrender. The only-begotten Son is no longer the vague, mysterious essence worshipped by Philo, but a living personality, capable of loving and of being loved. The incarnation of God in the form of man is no longer a transient apparition, which comes only to vanish, but the permanent and eternal indwelling of a divine Spirit in a human soul, uniting and blending for ever the attributes of earth and heaven. All these things were seen in the old world only as one sees the shadowy forms of objects in the night; when the sun rose, the objects indeed remained, and the ancient names were still attached to them, but the new light which permeated them made them altogether new. Yet let it not therefore be thought that the old world lived in vain. It had received a work to do, and up to the measure of its power most nobly had it performed it. It was commissioned to go forth and meet the light of Christianity, —to carry human nature as far as human nature could travel over that preparatory road which led to the renewal of a world's youth. And with all the feebleness of its efforts, its commission was not wholly unfulfilled. Gradually and insensibly, yet steadily and surely, the minds of men were ripened for the coming change. In ever deepening convictions of moral responsibility, and an ever increasing estimate

of human inadequacy to meet its requirements, in the perpetually recurring apprehension of God's nearness, in the occasional awakening to the truth that there is something more divine than strength, and in the emergence, at rare intervals, of even some realization of the necessity for sacrifice, we see the repeated gateways through which the human soul drew nearer to the measure of the stature of the perfect man.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE INGATHERING.

WE have now completed the first part of our preliminary inquiry. We have endeavoured briefly to trace the gradual shading of the old world into the standpoint of the new,—the process of preparation by which it was ever increasingly ripened for the reception of Christianity. We have next to consider the other side of the subject,—the manner in which Christianity gathered into itself all the elements of the old world which were not incongruous to its nature. ‘That in the dispensation of the fulness of times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ;’—such are the striking words in which the apostle of the Gentiles unfolds the design of Christianity. It proclaimed itself from the outset, not as the religion of a sect, but as a possible worship for all mankind. It presented terms of accommodation to every form of belief in existence, offered a meeting-place and a point of union to all the various systems which human imagination had devised. The breaking down of the middle wall of partition was not confined to Judaism; it took place over the whole world.

The spirit of the Christian religion is essentially cosmopolitan. Fitted by its nature for taking root in



every soil, it is yet unwilling to be limited to any, for it contemplates a universal brotherhood of souls, and therefore it aims at the obliteration of accidental differences. It has, indeed, been accused of a want of patriotism. To this it has been answered that, in beginning at Jerusalem, it paid the first tribute to the home of its nativity; but we think there is a deeper answer than this. It was necessary to the very existence of Christianity that it should discourage Jewish patriotism. Patriotism was in that age and in that nation the very greatest obstacle which the human mind presented to the reception of the new religion. Judaism would fain have made Christianity a mere revival of the Mosaic economy, in which the interests of the individual would again be subordinated to the political glory of the nation, and in which the nation itself would absorb all other families of the earth. A tendency more radically opposed to the spirit of the Christian religion cannot well be conceived; and it is not surprising that, from the very outset of its intellectual life, Christianity revealed its antagonism to this narrow nationality. It sought by every means to broaden and deepen the sympathies of that people amongst whom it had its being. It endeavoured to show them that their law had a far higher majesty than they were willing to allow to it; that its deepest significance lay, not in the fact of its being a national code, but in the certainty that it had its foundation in the very depths of human nature itself. That which belongs to us as human beings is of more value than that which belongs to us merely as the inhabitants of a certain country: this was the



truth which Judaism needed to learn, and therefore this was the truth which Christianity had first to promulgate. Accordingly, the Sermon on the Mount is a cosmopolitan sermon; it speaks to no age or nation, for it addresses every age and every nation. It appeals to no national characteristics, for it deals with those qualities which lie beneath all nationality, and which tend, not so much to distinguish man from man, as to distinguish man from all other creatures of creation.

Let us now proceed to see how this cosmopolitan tendency of the Christian spirit exemplified itself in finding a place of meeting for the religions of the old world. There was not one of its doctrines which did not present the possibility of a union with one or other of the heathen systems. It started from the thought of divine unity,—of a Being who was self-existent, and therefore in His nature incapable of change; and in this respect it was in harmony with that form of natural religion which found expression in China. China, as we have seen, deified changeless power, and discovered the highest symbol of that power in the title and authority of emperor. Christianity is also a theocracy. Here, too, the object of worship is recognised as the King of kings, eternal, immortal, and invisible, incapable of having His authority divided, and independent of all variableness and shadow of turning: the God of Christianity is essentially the Changeless One.

But Christianity did not stop here; it included the thought of India as well as of China. We have seen that if China deified the changeless, India worshipped

the changeful ; the Christian religion united both conceptions in one. God is now beheld, not as mere unity, but as unity in diversity ; not as mere changelessness, but as the changeless in the mutable. His nature is incapable of variation ; but then His nature is love, and love by its very definition implies a passing out into the lives of others. Hence the God of Christianity, although self-existent, is not self-contained. His glory is to reveal Himself. He comes forth in a series of ever increasing manifestations, beginning with creation, and ending with uniting His creation to Himself. Through all these manifestations there is preserved a strict unity, but it is a unity of principle, not of action ; it is the One in the many, the abiding Spirit inhabiting the numerous and fleeting forms, the eternal and immutable Love revealing itself in varied lights and shades, according to the character of those objects on which it shines. This is the Christian conception of God, and in it may be seen blended the earliest forms of belief conceived by the unaided mind of man. Here are reconciled the rigid unity of China and the perpetual variety of India ; the deep, unruffled rest, and the restless unceasing activity. From either of these, separately, the Christian religion stands far removed ; yet it reveals by the light of its own truth, that the errors which each of them exhibited in isolation, are dissipated and dispelled when they are merged into harmony.

With Buddhism, too, Christianity found a point of union. With Buddhism, as we have seen, this world was a scene of despair. Everything that existed existed in the worst possible manner, and the true

wisdom of every earnest mind was to abandon for ever the hope of obtaining satisfaction from earthly things. And Christianity confirmed and corroborated this decision of human nature—declared that in affirming its own impotence it had indeed weighed itself in a just balance. Christianity professed to visit a despairing world. Wherever the new religion discovered the presence of a belief in the natural state of things, it became convinced that there its influence would be futile. It refused even to begin its work until human nature had abandoned hers. As long as the world thought that it could know God by natural wisdom, it was superfluous to offer that world the possession of a higher light. It was imperatively necessary that men should exhaust themselves in their efforts to attain perfection of life ; and only where this exhaustion was felt, could the spirit of Christianity approach with power. The position of the Buddhist, so far from being unfavourable, was absolutely requisite to the reception of this higher faith ; despair was here the forerunner of hope, night was the parent of day, and weakness the beginning of strength. Like the fabled bird which rose out of its own ashes, the spirit of Christianity could only rise from the ashes of our old nature, from the ruin and destruction of that temple of human pride which had dedicated its worship to the glory of the heart of man.

The next religion taken up into the golden light is Parsism. We remember that this form of belief was an effort of the human soul to sound the depths of its own unrest. We have seen how, starting from the despair of Buddhism, it yet sought to surmount

that despair by discovering the source from which it came, the fountain whence it flowed. We have marked how, in this effort, it succeeded at least in touching the threshold of a great moral truth—the dualism in the heart of man. It recognised two sources of being,—a principle of light, and a principle of darkness,—and it felt the inward conflict of the soul to be only a reflex of the outward conflict in the universe. In this, indeed, Parsism has not found a full response in the spirit of Christianity, for Christianity recognises only one principle—the Father of lights, from whom every gift descends. But while the Christian religion admits no dualism in the universe, it discovers a very terrible one in the inward recesses of the soul, and it is even prepared to allow that the struggle in the world within protrudes itself in a thousand shapes upon the surface of the world without. It is written by one of its earliest teachers, that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth along with the spirit of man ; and in this there is a clear admission of the whole truth which slept in the heart of Parsism, that there is something in the human soul against which the beams of the eternal light are broken, and that the darkness which intervenes is shadowed forth upon all existing things. Christianity accepts in its essence the Parsee solution of the mystery of unrest ; and by the very act of accepting it, it summons human nature as a witness against itself to its own inherent degeneracy, and its own inability to rise.

The remaining religious history of the heathen

world exhibits a series of efforts to surmount the evil of human nature. These efforts in any case must have proved abortive, but they were rendered peculiarly so by a very prevalent delusion which pervaded the speculations of that day. It was held almost universally that the root of sin was matter, and every attempt to reach purity of life centred in the endeavour to conquer the influence of matter. It seems to us that these endeavours may all be ranged under three classes : those which struggled to crucify the material nature ; those which tried to exalt it ; and those which attempted to spiritualize it. The first was the effort of the Platonists. What Paul said at one suffering moment, they said during their whole lives : ‘ Who shall deliver us from this body of death ? ’ The beginning and the end of their moral creed was the radical evil of possessing a corporeal nature. This was the root of all corruption, the hindrance to all progress, the chain which prevented the soul from taking its natural flight. It was therefore the duty of every earnest man to aim at breaking this chain, to isolate himself ever more and more from the things of the body, to suppress its pleasures, to restrain its desires, to weaken and impair its very life. This was the creed of Platonism. It placed the divine nature entirely above the world ; God was far removed from those shifting, evanescent forms which engross the outward eye, and attract the sensuous life ; and he who would be like God must also seek to rise above the visible, and learn to contemplate exclusively the things which are unseen and eternal.



The second effort was that of the popular mythology, which strove to exalt matter by the doctrine of a divine incarnation. Admitting that the human body was in itself ignoble, could it not be made divine by receiving a divine tenant? If into these miserable fabrics which lodge the spirits of men there were to pass the spirits of celestial beings,—if these tabernacles, which had been hitherto only the receptacles of mortal life, were to become the dwelling-places of lives essentially immortal, would not this inevitably tend to exalt our conception of material things? Such seems to have been the unconscious and instinctive motive which prompted that large mass of the people whom philosophers called the vulgar to adopt, in preference to all philosophy, the belief that the gods were incarnate in humanity, and to cling to that belief when every other support had given way. It is true that, at the time when Christianity appeared, even this faith was rapidly dying, and, in the minds at least of the wealthy and luxurious, was being fast supplanted by that Epicurean recklessness so nearly allied to despair. Yet amidst the lower strata of society it still held its ground. In this region the instinctive impulses of our nature are less apt to be overborne by the trammels of conventional art, and here, accordingly, there long continued to linger the traces of a belief which the world professed to have outgrown.

The third effort to conquer material limitations was that of the Stoics. They endeavoured to surmount matter by spiritualizing it. They said this universe,



which we have been accustomed to regard only as an assemblage of shadows, is in truth a great reality; the shadows are all on the surface, but there is a life beneath them, eternal, immortal, and invisible. The material world is the embodiment of an infinite soul, and in the breath of that soul it lives and moves and has its being. Individual forms, indeed, are perishable, and worthy to perish; they seek to preserve an isolated, self-contained existence, and therefore it is only fitting that their existence should vanish with themselves. But beneath these forms there is a life which never dies, which outlasts all material changes, and abides through all outward transformations. Let the individual man yield himself up to this life; let him sacrifice his petty interest to enrich the wealth of universal being; let him forget his own pains and tears and misfortunes in the sense of his unity with the great Spirit of nature, which holds his frail existence only as a drop is held by the mighty ocean.

Now, Christianity reconciles all the three—the voice of Platonism, the voice of the popular mythology, and the voice of Stoicism. It is undeniable that in every one of them there is contained a distinct truth, which only becomes a falsehood by being isolated from other truths; the Christian religion blends them into unity, and thus completes in them what is defective without destroying what is distinctive. The medium through which Christianity accomplishes this reconciliation is the doctrine of the Trinity. This article of faith was in one aspect an article of peace to the heathen world, for on one or other of its three sides it presented a point of union to the three systems we

have described. With Platonism, it said that the things which are seen and temporal are inadequate to fill the soul of man ; that the object of divine worship is infinitely above the material universe—the Father of all, whose light is inaccessible. With the popular belief, it said that, although higher than all material forms, He was yet manifest in the flesh, dwelling within the precincts of a human soul, and clothed with the embodiment of a human shape ; there is the Sonship as well as the Fatherhood. With Stoicism, it said that His manifestation is not limited to one aspect, that His divine spirit pervades the length and the breadth of the universe, and that in Him all nature lives and moves and has its being.

The doctrine of the Trinity thus presented a place of meeting for beliefs not only different, but in some respects even divergent. It is true that this doctrine did not appear for the first time in the Christian religion ; on the contrary, we know of scarcely any form of worship which has not some trace of a trinity. In China, where the natural bent was towards unity, there appeared latterly a tendency to recognise a threefold existence of God. In India we have Brahm the creator, and Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva the being who destroys to create anew. In Persia, where a principle of goodness was opposed to a principle of evil, there was originally the belief in one who existed behind both, and from whom both derived their power. In Platonism we have the clear statement of a triune divine nature, borrowed from the analogy of human life, with its body, its animal impulses, and its spiritual intuitions. But while all this

is true, while the belief in the Trinity was not new as a doctrine, it was entirely new as a practical power. Before this time it had been held merely as a speculative theory; it was now recognised as a pervading influence. There came a time, long centuries afterwards, when this doctrine was regarded even by its professed adherents as outside the range of practical religion, but in the first two centuries it was not so. These have been called the Trinitarian centuries; nor is the name inapplicable or inappropriate. The theology of that period seems very much to have centred around this one tenet. The discussions on fate, free-will, and foreknowledge absolute had not yet emerged into being,—even the great fact of atonement had scarcely been subjected to the process of human analysis; but around the doctrine of the Trinity the mind of the early Church hovered with breathless interest. Nor, judging even from the brief survey we have already made, can we wonder at this interest. We have seen that this belief, so far from being unpractical, had the greatest possible influence upon the world of that day, and did more than any other to unite conflicting opinions. It presented that beautiful diversity in the midst of unity which ever tends to reconcile the champions of opposing views. It offered to the world three different aspects in which it might contemplate God, and there was scarcely a phase of the human mind to which one or other of these aspects did not apply.

There are only three ways in which we can think of God,—either as the unknown Being dwelling above all His works, or as Himself the Spirit which

pervades and animates these works, or as endued with a human form and found in fashion as a man. Between these views the whole world was divided; and when there appeared a religion which blended and harmonized them all in one, it inevitably gathered to itself those beliefs which had been scattered and discordant. Nor, in thus condescending to appropriate existing materials, did Christianity stoop beneath itself, or belie the grandeur of its mission. In so doing, it only came into harmony with every law of the universe and every department of life. When there breaks upon the scene of time a new and higher stage of development, it never begins by obliterating the old one; on the contrary, it takes up the old life and makes it new in its own light. Manhood does not destroy the years of childhood; it retains them as the very roots of its being. Civilisation does not eradicate the primitive instincts of our nature; it only transplants them into a cultured soil. Sunshine does not extinguish the light of the night-planets; it gathers up that light into itself, and reveals it anew as a part of its own glory. So pre-eminently has it been with the spirit of Christianity. Laying claim to an origin higher than earth can yield, professing to have stooped from a height beyond what imagination has conceived, it has yet sought to manifest its divine strength, not by the repulsion, but by the attraction of existing things. Finding in the night of human speculations the glimmering light of a few scattered stars of truth, it has taken them all up into its own radiance, and has thereby confirmed and perpetuated them. And by this accommodation

to the natural instincts of the human mind, Christianity has increased rather than lessened its power. It has revealed the potent fact that the supernatural is not the unnatural, and that a religion which comes from above is not bound to be antagonistic to things below. Above all, it has become itself the evidence of its own truth ; for, in discovering a meeting-place for the discordant views of men, it has supplied the missing link to the establishment of our human brotherhood, and has provided the only key which man has ever found to unlock the doors of the mystery of life.



## CHAPTER IV.

### BIRTHPLACE OF THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTIANITY.

WE have now completed our retrospect. We have endeavoured in brief compass to exhibit the relation which Christianity bore to the religious systems which preceded it; and we have arrived at this definite conclusion, that while on one side it presented itself as a development of the natural mind, on another it revealed itself in an aspect essentially new. Thus far we may be said to have been considering its parentage, and we have seen that parentage to have been partly earthly and partly above the earth; one-half of its origin being supplied by already existing elements, and the other being derived from the communication and inbreathing of a higher life. And now, having completed our retrospective survey, we are in a position to trace the progress of this higher life itself which has dawned upon the world. Ere we do so, however, it may be well to pause for a moment, in order that we may briefly contemplate the earliest home of this new religion. It is a fact which cannot be denied, that every existence is, in some measure, coloured by the circumstances and surroundings of the place of its birth; and as Christianity has not been afraid



to accommodate itself to human conditions, we shall not be surprised to find that it was very materially influenced by the scene of its nativity.

Judea must at all times be acknowledged to be one of the most interesting studies which can be presented to a historian. Its interest will be found to lie in the contrast between the wonderful part it played in history, and those apparently insignificant means at its disposal to perform it. Geographically it is one of the smallest amongst nations, and would have constituted only a province of the surrounding empires of its day. Nor in mental characteristics does it appear to have been specially gifted, at least not in any secular direction; neither in philosophy nor in art does it occupy the position of the Hellenic mind. Yet this nation, so small in extent, so limited in resources, so inconsiderable in military power, so moderate in mental endowments, has accomplished greater deeds and occupied a wider place in the world than all other lands put together. Inferior in strength to Persia, Babylonia, and Egypt, it has extended its conquests into regions and into ages which to these mighty empires were unknown. Going back to a more remote antiquity than either Greece or Rome, it is at this moment nearer to our thoughts than either of these, and all its historical incidents are far less shrouded in the mist of ages than the triumphs of the Roman legions and the deeds of Spartan heroism.

This pre-eminence, so far above expectation, and so far above its material resources, has deservedly rendered Judea one of the most interesting objects which

can engage the attention of the student of history. That such vast results should have emanated from nothing higher than these insignificant secular forces, he will find it impossible to conclude; and as there must be a cause adequate to so great an effect, he will naturally be constrained to ask where this cause is to be found. And, indeed, the student of history will not look far until he find it. With all the inferiority which Judea presented to surrounding nations, there was one respect in which it excelled them all—we mean the force of its religious life. It is not that these other nations were not actuated by sincere religious feelings; in our preceding chapters we have endeavoured to show that they were so. But the difference lies in this, that while the nations outside Judea had a religion, the religion of Judea was the nationality itself. The surrounding empires held religion as one phase of their national life, but in Palestine the religion was itself the life, and all other things were only its phases. We can imagine Persia and Egypt without a religion, but let us try to conceive Judea without Judaism, and we shall find ourselves gazing into vacancy. The religious life of Palestine was the parent of its secular life. The worship of Greece was the product of its poetry, but the poetry of Judea was the product of its worship. The Greek looked out upon the visible universe with an eye and with a heart peculiarly susceptible to impressions of physical loveliness. He surveyed it with the gaze of a poet; and as he gazed, it became ever grander and more grand to his view, until at last it seemed to him the very essence of divinity; and out of his poetry there

grew a sublime religion,—sublime, at least, in its æsthetic power, and strong in its attractions over the outward man. But with the Jew it was all the reverse. His religion was not a growth from anything, it was itself the principle of growth in everything. The first thought in his soul was the thought of God; that was the foundation of all his ideas and of all his actions. He recognised no second causes; all joy was received as a divine gift, all sorrow as a divine punishment. He admitted the authority of no secular government; he bowed down before the reign of a theocracy, and God was to him the King of kings. He carried the thought of God to the study of all things, and in the light of that thought he measured them. Hence nature was to him the voice of God; as such, and as such alone, it was beautiful to his heart. In his grandest flights of poetry he never dreamt of describing nature apart from the source of its being. He beheld the heavens as the vesture of the Almighty, the time-garment in which He had enrobed Himself. He looked upon the clouds as the chariots by which His presence was brought near to human eyes. He contemplated the winds as the ministering spirits whom He sent forth from clime to clime to bear His message of mercy. He listened to the thunder and he trembled, for he heard in it the voice of an offended God speaking out His displeasure to the sons of men. And while he wondered and admired, never for a moment did he allow the manifestation to absorb the reality. Nature to him was at best only a vanishing scene, and of the

heavens themselves he was not afraid to say, 'They perish, but Thou remainest; they all wax old as doth a garment, but Thou art the same.' His poetry was but the product of his religion, and therefore his thought of nature was lost in his thought of nature's God.

This, then, was the foundation of Judea's greatness; it is the strength of its religious faith which has made its influence immortal. This was the one inheritance of goodness which Judaism bequeathed to Christianity,—the one desirable possession which the childhood of the new religion derived from its connection with Jewish soil. Unfortunately, the home influences exerted upon Christianity were not entirely good, and it was compelled to receive from Judaism an inheritance of evil as well as of blessing. If the glory of the Jewish mind was the strength of its religious conviction, the bane of that mind was the strength of its religious pride: the spirit of national exclusiveness is the dark spot which blemishes the page of its history. Christianity was essentially the religion of brotherhood, but it was born in a land where no brotherhood was recognised outside the limits of the nation; and this untoward circumstance in its nativity retarded its progress for many years,—to some extent is retarding it still. At the time when the new light dawned upon the world, Judaism had, indeed, begun to relax somewhat in its spirit of isolation. For this relaxation its repeated and its long captivities had in great measure been preparing it, as, indeed, they were designed to prepare it.

Few nations occupying a prominent place in history

have undergone so many periods of bondage, but it is not difficult to see that the periods of bondage were themselves the chief stages in the national education. A nation which held its glory to consist in its isolation from other lands, must be subjected to a course of discipline which will bring it to a contrary conviction. It must be forced to travel into those very countries which it despises, must be constrained to dwell amidst those manners and forms of life at which it sneers, nay, must, in a measure, be subjected to their influence and their domination. The present effect will be painful, but the future consequence will be salutary. The nation will come forth from its captivity bearing along with it all its old possessions and some foreign treasures besides, for it will carry back to its early home some part of the life which animated the land of its bondage. It will never again be so self-contained, never again so wrapt up in its own individual life: the box of ointment, when it has been broken, allows that fragrance to go forth which it once kept imprisoned. To nations, as to individuals, the experience of suffering brings enlargement, and widens the boundaries of their being. With Judea it was emphatically so. It came forth from its long captivity in Babylon enriched by its bondage and enlarged by its sorrows. Its very literature rises to higher flights, and embraces problems of more wide-spread interest. Pre-eminently do there begin to appear the fore-shadowings and anticipations of that catholic spirit which Christianity was to diffuse. Already in the



pages of its noblest prophets we begin to see rents and gaps in that middle wall of partition which was ere long to be broken down altogether, and there are not wanting instances in which the inspired seer forgets even his Judaism in the intense realization of his kindred with universal humanity.

Nevertheless, at the time when Christianity appeared, there still existed in the nation a highly influential class, whose sympathies were buried with the dead past—we allude, of course, to the Pharisees. Their name bespeaks their character. The word Pharisee means separatist. It may perhaps have been originally bestowed as a term of reproach, but it was assuredly appropriated as a badge of glory. The Pharisee boasted in his separatism. He had sprung into existence at a period subsequent to the Babylonian captivity, and he regretted greatly that he had been born so late. He would have rejoiced to have been a subject of that old theocracy which had constituted his country's earliest government, ere yet the foot of the invader had polluted its hallowed soil. His Eden was all in the past, and the only paradise which he would consent to behold in the future was a possible restoration of that past. The dream which he cherished was the restoration of a hierarchy which would embrace within itself the attributes of priest and king,—a government in which religion would not only wield the moral sceptre which belongs to it, but would be invested, at the same time, with the rod of outward dominion. He looked forward to an enlargement of the national boundaries, but it was an enlargement through conquest, not through union.



The Jew was ever to remain the Jew, but there was to come a time when no other existence would be recognised on the face of the earth. Then, and then alone, would the Pharisee consent to believe in the brotherhood of humanity. That nations holding a different faith from his own should yet have sprung from the same divine parentage, was a creed from which he would have recoiled with horror. Before he would admit the possibility of charity, he must see the distinctions obliterated, and the surrounding empires flocking as suppliants into that temple of Jerusalem, whose walls were to enfold all the revelations of God.

Now there are two facts on this subject which cannot escape us. On the one hand, it is quite certain that the religious principle of the Pharisee was exactly the reverse of the religious principle introduced by Christianity; for the leading thought of Christianity was the opposite of separatism; it was brotherhood, the breaking down of all partitions, the gathering together of the fragments into one great unity. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that, in the outward history of Christianity, the tendency of the Pharisee has been more amply reproduced than that of any other Jewish party. The Sadducees, in spite of their rationalism, were a stage nearer to the Christian principle, for they had learned from their captivity that isolation is not the glory either of individuals or of nations. The Essenes, in spite of their asceticism, were seeking truth in the manner recommended by the gospel, by self-abnegation and poverty of spirit. Yet neither the Sadducees nor the Essenes have exercised over

the Christian Church a tithe of that influence which has been exerted by the Pharisaic tendency. In the lapse of a few centuries Judaism lived again, and Christianity constructed a new home after the model of its birthplace. How this is to be accounted for; why it was that a religion whose leading thought was the essential brotherhood of mankind, should yet have been content for ages to occupy a throne of despotism; wherefore it happened that a faith which first revealed itself to the world under the garb of deepest humility, should yet have consented to be exalted on a pinnacle of pride, and to replace the ministry of the servant by the hierarchy of priestly domination,—all this in due season we shall come to see. We have not as yet entered upon the history of Christianity's development, and, in alluding to these facts in anticipation, our sole desire has been to exhibit the influence of the birthplace on the child—to show in what respect and to what extent the spirit of Christianity has been affected by the spirit of Judaism. The result of that influence may be thus briefly summarized.

Christianity began by attracting the lowliest and most obscure of all the Jewish parties—we mean the Essenes. It was the very fact of their lowliness which predisposed them in favour of the new religion. They were composed chiefly of the poor and humble of the land, and they accepted their condition as a virtue. They, too, were separatists, but of a different nature from the Pharisees. The Pharisee withdrew from the heathen world in the interests of Judaism; the Essene withdrew from all forms of the world,

whether Jewish or heathen, in the interests of a life of mysticism. To him, as to the Buddhist, self-abnegation had presented itself as the source of all blessedness; his leading thought was dissatisfaction with existing things; and he was therefore peculiarly prepared for the reception of a religion which required as the earliest gift of its votaries the poverty of spirit. But by and by there came a change. It ere long became apparent that Christianity was adapted to the rich as much as to the poor, and that it was as fitted for an age of culture as for a season of primitive simplicity. And with the dawning of this conviction, the new religion began to cast off its opposition to worldly forms, and to claim a heritage on the soil of all nations.

The age of the Essenes was past, and the cosmo-politan spirit of the Sadducees prevailed. If Christianity had lost something of its first fervour, if the freshness of its opening life had suffered some abatement, if in the room of its simple faith there had been substituted an effort to construct the fabric upon the basis of human reason, it still cannot be denied that the gain counterbalanced the loss, for it was now that the new religion awoke into some sympathy with all religions, and discovered a wide-spread affinity to the desires and hopes of universal man. It was now that the religion of Christ took up into itself, and claimed for its own, the fruits of existing culture. All that was true in all systems, all that was good in all philosophies, all that was refining in all civilisations, was found to be only the prospective foreshadowing of the light which lighteth every man.

The missionary travels of the early disciples may not unreasonably be supposed to have hastened this end: they gave much, but they got something in return; they bestowed the treasures of heaven, but they received a portion of the spirit of earth. And that spirit made them Gentiles instead of Jews. They became larger in their sympathies, and broader in their charity. And as the product of this enlargement there sprang up a rich Christian literature,—a literature which, while it burned with all the zeal which animated the heart of Judaism, was yet mellowed and ennobled by the sentiment of human brotherhood, and devotion to the good of all mankind,—a literature which, while it preserved inviolable the foundation of its early purity, was yet not afraid to build on that foundation the latest results of surrounding thought and culture. This was, upon the whole, the golden period of the Church's history, and, like most golden periods, its duration was brief. A third stage was coming, whose empire was to be long unbroken, and whose dominion is even yet a mighty power amongst us. The Essenes and the Sadducees had each in turn bequeathed their influence to Christianity, and the kingdom of the Pharisees was now to appear.

Christianity had become a world-embracing power, and this was well; but there is a danger of the world-embracing passing into the worldly. And that danger Christianity was doomed to meet. At what special period of its history the transition took place we cannot definitely say; the historians of the Church have arrived at no unanimity as to the date of its

absorption in the world. Undoubtedly the advent of this new spirit was a process rather than an act ; a growth from the little to the great, from the tendency to the confirmed nature. The outward history of the Church exhibits a gradual progress of the sacred towards the secular. Already, with Irenæus, the outward forms of religion begin to usurp the pre-eminence over its inward life ; with Tertullian, the march of Christianity towards a secular empire is advanced a stage nearer ; with Cyprian, the authority of the hierarchy is insisted upon as a matter of the highest magnitude ; with Augustine, the Church no longer scruples to crush all nonconformity by the power of the secular arm ; and that union of Christianity with the state, which to a spiritual age might have proved a blessing, becomes only another link in the chain which binds it to a worldly life. And that union itself is short-lived. Christianity aspires to something more than equality with the civil power. In less than three centuries after the state had united with the Church, we find it sinking beneath that Church, and yielding up into its hands the paramount sceptre ; and although there are ebbings and flowings in the tide of empire, the victory remains with the hierarchy. At last the final step is taken, and the spirit of Pharisaism attains its full resurrection : the state sinks beneath the sea, and the Church itself becomes the civil power ; the offices of priest and king are blended together in one dread theocracy, and the armies of united Europe tremble before the mandate of one solitary man, whom the Church has elected to represent the will of Heaven.



Such has been the influence of the spirit of Judaism upon the outward life of Christianity. It will be seen that the Pharisaic element has exerted by far the greatest potency; and that therefore, in an outward sense, this religion has received from its birthplace a heritage rather calamitous than beneficial. We say in an outward sense, for there is an altogether different aspect in which the subject may be viewed, and in which these pages are designed to view it. The circumstances of a life which are outwardly calamitous may be inwardly only the stages of a progressive development. If we were to write the history of a man's spiritual being, we would require to measure his prosperity and adversity by a purely immaterial standard; and it would inevitably happen that many things which, naturally speaking, could only be reckoned misfortunes, would, in the spiritual region, be regarded as the steps of promotion. Now Christianity has also a spiritual as well as an external history,—a history which closely follows the analogy of individual life; which begins with the child, and branches out into the youth, and culminates in the full-grown man. We do not say this metaphorically, or in any figurative sense whatsoever. When we compare the life of a nation to the life of an individual, we are indeed employing merely a poetical image, for a nation is nothing more than a collective union of individual lives. But there is a life in Christianity which is antecedent to the lives of all its members.

We have seen that when this religion dawned upon the world, there was something more than a bursting forth of heathen systems into high development. That

would have been only the climax of the old, but in this there was also something new ; and that which was new was not a doctrine, nor a theory, nor a philosophy, but something more elementary than any of these—a life. It was the impartation to the world of a higher spirit, of a superior force, of an additional breath of divine being. The human soul was lifted, as it were, up to a loftier platform, from which it could, indeed, survey the objects of its past perception, but where even these were beheld from a height and were comparatively dwarfed by the vision of an upward glory ; Christianity, in short, was the advent of a new life. That life was at first supernatural ; it could not be explained by any existing conditions, nor could it be regarded as merely the result of all previous conditions put together : it descended from above. Nevertheless, the moment this vital principle came into contact with the human soul, it ceased to be supernatural, and entered into conformity with the laws of nature. The instant it lighted upon humanity it submitted to all the ways of humanity—consented to follow a human growth, and to reach its consummation by the steps of a human development. Accordingly it began where individual childhood begins. It started from the grain of mustard-seed, and accepted the conditions necessary to produce the harvest ; it sought to hasten its advance by no magical process ; it chose to operate through the conscious will of a responsible being, and where that will opposed its progress it allowed itself to be retarded.

This is what we mean when we speak of the spirit of Christianity being developed : we mean that its life

is analogous to the course of all lives, that its divinity has a human side, and that by reason of its humanity it is its nature to grow. The life of Christianity is a repetition of the life of its Founder; it reaches its maturity through a childhood, and its crown through a cross. And as, in the earthly history of its divine Head, the cross loses its calamitous character in the vision of a prospective glory, to which it is a preliminary stage, so the dark places in the annals of Christianity break forth into resplendent brightness when seen as the phases of thought by which its education is perfected. Viewed from this inward side, we seem to see the plan of church history no longer through a glass darkly, but already face to face. The imperfection of the parts is atoned for by the symmetry of the whole. The outward blemishes, which the historian notes as he passes by, are transformed into steps of spiritual advancement when he casts back his gaze upon the retrospect of the finished work. Persecutions, heresies, superstitions, barbarisms, the undue predominance of worldly influence, the overweening prevalence of Jewish thought, the temporary hiding of spiritual intuitions beneath the panoply of scholastic arguments, are all beheld as avenues to the coming light,—lessons which Christianity has to learn in its school-days, to mature it for the duties and the work of riper years. Such is the spirit in which we intend to survey its annals. With its outward history, indeed, we shall have little to do. With its wars and rumours of wars, with its struggles for temporal dominion, with its efforts to conform the minds of men to one uniform type of thought and action, with

its martyrs who glorified it, and its missionaries who diffused its light over land and sea, with the proceedings of its councils and the external history of its creeds and doctrines, with the many intricate questions suggested by its government, and discipline, and laws, these pages have naturally no concern. Where they shall touch them, they shall touch them only as parts of a wider whole, as chapters of a vaster subject. Our sole question shall be, What relation do the outward events of church history bear to the development of the Christian spirit? Have they furthered it, or have they retarded it? Do they constitute stages of education, or do they mark the milestones of a retrogressive life? According to our answer to that question, and according to that answer alone, shall we pronounce the external vicissitudes of the Church to be prosperous or adverse, calamitous or beneficial. We may require to congratulate ourselves upon many things which men have been accustomed to deplore, perhaps to deplore some things which men have been accustomed to applaud; for the estimate of good and evil fortune may be transposed by the standpoint of contemplation, and the balance which has been struck by the measurement of the outward eye may be totally reversed when we view it by the standard of the spiritual life.

## CHAPTER V.

### TRANSITION FROM INFANCY INTO CHILDHOOD.

THE infancy of the Christian religion is the period of its miracles. A miracle literally means something which is wonderful, and in this simplest sense of the word all infancy may be said to be the age of miracle. In one view, indeed, wonder is not infantine, but highly intellectual,—it deepens with the advance of intelligence. But the wonder of infancy is not the wonder of intellect, but of sensation ; it is concerned, not with the mysteries of life, but only with the manifestations of life. Nor will its eye be more attracted by the light of heaven than by the glitter of a shining bauble. Yet, such as it is, this feeling of wonder is the fitting commencement for the life of man ; it is the hunger which draws in the stores of experience, and makes them the property of the soul. The mind of infancy looks out upon this world with a sense of novelty ; it knows nothing of law, and therefore law is itself a miracle. And where every fact is above the range of its previous nature, the possession of that fact becomes an object of great desire ; wonder is the parent of all knowledge.

Now the inward life of Christianity begins with the sense of wonder. If we read the earliest of its his-



torical records which have come down to us, we shall see that the dialogues embraced in them consist very much of question and answer. The disciple is as yet in a stage of pure reciprocity, he has everything to learn and nothing to impart; and therefore the only intercourse he can enjoy with the Master is that expression of wonder which asks the meaning of surrounding things. Nor need we be surprised at this first attitude of the Christian disciple; he had indeed ground for astonishment. The law of a new life had descended upon the world, destined in due season to become natural to the spirit of man, but as yet above human experience, and therefore in the highest sense miraculous. It came not in the form of a theory, nor in the guise of an abstract speculation; it was embodied and manifested in the life of a single soul. The facts as they appear in history are briefly these. Nearly nineteen centuries ago there stood forth in the midst of this world a mysterious Being,—mysterious in any view which men have formed of Him, whether natural or supernatural. Never in the annals of mankind have such lofty claims been united to circumstances so unpretentious and so lowly. He came from the obscurest part of a then obscure country; from a race which at one time, indeed, was regal, but which had gradually declined into the deepest insignificance. He came with no weapons in His hands, He brought with Him no material resources to overawe the pride of men; the impression He produced upon the crowd was not that of one bent on conquest, but of one who was meek and lowly of heart. And yet this Being, so gentle, so removed from all associations of phy-

sical force, was indeed bent upon a conquest to which Cæsar and Alexander had never dared to aspire. He aimed at the subjugation of the whole moral world, and that not for a few years or for a few centuries, but for all time and for all eternity. He proposed to establish a kingdom which should outlast the vicissitudes of ages, and ultimately gather into itself all things in earth and heaven. Of this kingdom He was Himself to be the head and the centre, and in His own person was to sum up the glories of the theocracy. Others had come proclaiming to the world the discovery of some great truth, or of some grand system of philosophy—there had even been those who had professed to have reached the source of absolute knowledge; but here was a step beyond. Here was One who not only professed to have reached absolute truth, but who declared Himself to be that truth; who not only claimed to be the bearer of a new revelation, but asserted that He was Himself the highest revelation which humanity could ever receive of things divine. He announced Himself as the light of the world, the door, the way, the truth, the life. He declared that He alone knew the thoughts of the Father, that to Him was entrusted all power in heaven and in earth—nay, that the spiritual region was itself under His control; that He was able to remit sins, and that at last He would judge the quick and the dead.

And the strangest thing of all was the instrumentality by which He proposed to achieve this empire over humanity. *It was by the sacrifice of Himself.* We cannot conceive an idea more unnatural to the

general tendency of the Jewish mind, more repugnant to its religious sentiments, more opposed to its national prejudices. Sacrifice had up to this time been regarded by the nation as something which belonged exclusively to the subjects of the theocracy, something which expressed man's attitude in relation to God. But here was an entire reversal of the whole idea of sacrifice. A Being, who professed to be Himself the head of the theocracy, proposes to alter the relation which He had hitherto borne to His subjects, and instead of calling upon them to offer their oblations to Him, He claims it as His prerogative to be Himself the offerer. He purposes to make men perfect by His own sufferings ; to conquer by stooping ; to reclaim by dying.

The conjunction of elements so seemingly antagonistic was of all things the most startling to the eyes of His contemporaries. It was to them a source of unmixed wonder, and the wonder was not conjoined with admiration. Their admiration could not extend beyond the perception of outward miracles, and the reason is not difficult to find. Miracles appealed to something which was deeply rooted in the Jewish mind—the desire for physical empire. The spirit of self-sacrifice appealed to something to which the mind of the Jew was as yet a stranger—the knowledge that there is a higher empire than the physical.

Yet the miracles attributed to this mysterious Being had little power over His contemporaries, and the cause of this is plain. The certain conviction that an outward prodigy had been performed would never have conveyed to the Jew that impression of astonish-

ment which it would carry to us of modern times. It was an age of credulity, and an age of credulity is not prone to wonder at seeming violations of outward law. But it was not an age of spirituality, and therefore to the men that lived in it, spirituality was the greatest miracle. That a kingdom which was not of the world should yet absorb the world,—that a crown should be reached by the sacrifice of those very things for which men generally covet its possession,—that a conquest should be attained, not by the subjugation of others into servitude, but by the conqueror becoming himself the servant of others,—this was a doctrine which burst upon the mind of Judaism with all the force of an anomaly—an anomaly which at first riveted attention by its very repulsiveness to the natural heart. The source of Christianity's success was at the outset its originality. There came a time when men perceived its underlying harmony with all things, but that time was not yet. It was the new element in the religion which brought it into conspicuous fame, and that new element was the power of the cross, at one and the same moment its reproach and its glory. The instant it revealed itself in antagonism to the worldly standpoint, it secured its immortality, because thereby it declared that while it might blend other things with itself, it never could be blended with them. It stood forth as a new phenomenon, and compelled the world to gaze at it by the sheer force of bold, uncompromising opposition.

But we must now advance a step farther. We have seen that the period of natural infancy may be described as a stage of unintelligent and sensuous

wonder; the mind has not yet become sharer in that which it sees. We have seen that the opening life of Christianity in the world had to pass through a similar experience; that the earliest disciples who gathered round the Master were rather the beholders than the recipients of that Master's spirit. But there comes a time in individual life when passive wonder merges into active imitation, and this is perhaps the boundary-line between the life of the infant and the life of the child. The infant in the natural world is already the father of the man, and the spirit of the man is all along sleeping unconsciously within it; it is therefore inevitable here that wonder should give place to imitation. But in the life of Christianity, such a transmutation was by no means inevitable. The disciples had not as yet received the spirit of the Master; it was still outside of them. Now there can be no imitation where there is no community of spirit; there cannot even exist a desire to imitate where there has not already existed something kindred to the being whom we emulate. As long as the spiritual element in Christianity was looked at as a mere external phenomenon, it was not even recognised by the heart of the disciple; and as long as it was unrecognised, the disciple could never emerge from the stage of passive wonder into the stage of active imitation. He might, indeed, have been taught to perform the outward precepts of Christianity, just as the dog may be taught to repeat some of its master's actions; but in neither case could the process be dignified with the name of imitation, it would have been nearer to mechanism than to intelligence. The



divine Founder of Christianity must be a communicator before He could be an example, must implant His own spirit in the hearts of His disciples ere He could ask them to imitate His deeds.

Here, then, was the grand problem which the Master had to solve,—in what way it was possible to transform the worshippers of the seen and temporal into the worshippers of the unseen and eternal. He had proclaimed Himself to be the head of the theocracy, and a large and ever increasing company had admitted the claim. Yet theirs had been at best a utilitarian love ; they had sought Him for the sake of that bread which He distributed, had esteemed Him for what He did rather than for what He was. How was this love which was born of expediency to be transmuted into a love born of the heart ? how was the devotion to the material to be elevated into sympathy with the spiritual ? There was clearly one thing which above all others was necessary : the Master must Himself become invisible ; it was expedient for them that He should go away. The love of the unseen must precede the power of the unseen, and the love of the unseen would be best promoted by withdrawing from sight and contact the object of human affection ; the personality of the Master would thereby be separated from His actions. If the immediate result of this would be to cause the disciple to gaze up stedfastly into heaven, and ignore the things of earth, there would yet even in this be a step of real advancement. The spirit of Judaism had hitherto never yet gazed stedfastly into heaven. It had, indeed, recognised the existence of a Power

infinitely far removed, dwelling on a height unapproachable by human thought. But Judaism had made this very fact the pretext for a symbolical worship. The infinite distance at which its deity resided had led it rather to undervalue than to magnify the power of the invisible, and the place and rites of worship came to receive that reverence which should have belonged to its object alone. But with the adoration of an unseen Christ, all this was to pass away. There were to be no more finite mediators between God and man; no temple of Jerusalem, where alone men must worship; no necessity for interposing angels to interpret between the divine and the human. Man was himself to be brought into immediate contact with God, and was to experience the deep conviction that heaven and earth had met together.

Undoubtedly there was here contemplated a real advance in the spiritual life. For the first time in its history, the heart of Judaism was to be fixed exclusively upon the love of the unseen. In the very earliest of those rites which were intended to be distinctive of the new religion, the leading thought is that of communion with the invisible. The ceremony is of the simplest kind, as if to exclude any temptation to be attracted by outward things. The disciples are to meet together in one common brotherhood, and to partake of the elements of bread and wine as the memorials of a love whose outward manifestation has passed away. The object of their thoughts is still to be the Head of the theocracy, and they are still to realize His presence in the very centre of their

circle and in the very midst of their path of life ; but now, for the first time, it is to be the realization of an invisible presence, the recognition by the heart of an object the eye cannot see ; and those outward actions which were once prone to absorb their whole spiritual being, are now to live only as a memory of the past. Nay, the very memory of an outward love is itself already a love of the invisible, for it accustoms the mind to divert its thoughts from the passing hour, and to centre its interest in something which is outside the range of material possessions.

But the love of the unseen is not sufficient to constitute religious spirituality, it must be followed by the power of the unseen. If the former was reached in the thought of an ascended Christ, the latter was attained in that wondrous Pentecostal outpouring which made the spirit of the Master the spirit also of the disciple. If Christianity was born into the world with the birth of its Founder, it only became the possession of the world when the life of that Founder, withdrawn from outward sight, became a spiritual power within it. Here was the real transition from infancy into childhood. In the natural life of an individual man it is impossible to determine the time when the spirit passes the boundary-line which separates the infant from the child ; but Christianity professes to mark with minutest accuracy the very day and hour when first it became a conscious sharer in the possessions of the spiritual world. It has a mark by which it can determine its Pentecost. In beautiful accordance with a law of human psychology, the advent of the

new life was followed by an unheard of gift of utterance—the depth of spiritual power giving new force and intensity to the soul's expression. This is the only feature of the miracle which belongs to the secular historian, for secular history can touch a miracle only where a miracle touches law. In every miraculous deed recorded in the earliest Christian writings, there may be said to be two parts, a body and a soul. The body is the special form in which the truth has clothed itself for the moment; it is that which meets the eye, and is destined to pass away. But the soul is that eternal truth itself which is symbolized and figured in the outward form; it is that which remains when the visible manifestation has ceased to be, and which gives to the manifestation its permanent and indestructible value. The form in which this gift of utterance clothed itself has long since disappeared from view, and Christendom is by no means unanimous with regard to the aspect it presented. The majority of evangelical divines believe it to have been the power of speaking foreign languages, yet even amongst this class there is a large and influential party who have found themselves unable to accept such an interpretation. That these have succeeded in offering a more plausible solution can hardly be affirmed, for every theory propounded has difficulties of its own. Whether we say with some that it was the capacity to give adequate expression to the new enthusiasm, or with others that it was the power to clothe the thoughts in obsolete forms of speech; whether we regard it as

a marvellous fluency of extemporaneous utterance imparted to ignorant men, or as the ability to give name to those thoughts which had hitherto existed vaguely and undefinedly, we shall find on any of these suppositions something not easily harmonized with all the facts of the narrative. Be this as it may, it is a question rather for the biblical critic than for the church historian, and history can only now view it in so far as it illustrates a law of spiritual development. And it is here that the miracle acquires a universal interest. In the individual life, the birth of language is the death of infancy; the very word infancy means inability to speak. Speech is the first object of imitation which engrosses the opening intelligence; and with the earliest successful effort of that intelligence to express itself in audible sounds, the barrier is already surmounted which separates the infant from the child. Max Müller has somewhere felicitously remarked, that the reason why the lower animals are unable to speak is because they have nothing to say. If it be so, it furnishes a striking illustration of the extremely close connection which subsists between thought and language. Indeed, it is impossible even from the most cursory observation to evade the evidence of this connection. That the heart speaketh out of the abundance of its thoughts is a truth of human experience. All eloquence is an expression of fervid thought. We are accustomed to say in familiar utterance, that a man who has not manifested much fluency of speech has never got into the spirit of his subject, and in saying this we are



more philosophical than we imagine. When a man gets into the spirit of a subject, or, which is the same thing, when the spirit of a subject gets into him, it becomes the source of a new language, and impels him to give utterance to that which is within him. He has no longer a choice in the matter; he must speak out, for the life which he has received is too large to be contained in his own being. The higher that life, the more will it demand expression, and the loftier expression will it demand. If we could imagine that, for the first time in the world's history, the spirit of poetry had entered into a man, the utterance of that man would be altogether supernatural; it would be unlike anything ever heard before, and to the rest of mankind it would, for the present, be unintelligible; before they could understand the words, they would need to share the spirit. But here was the entrance into the world of a life infinitely higher than the spirit of poetry,—a life which comprehended in itself the essence of everything which is great, but which was itself greater than all. At first it was exhibited in the existence of a single soul, and that soul stood forth as a great light in a world which comprehended it not. The language of the Master was of necessity a foreign language, because the spirit which prompted it was itself a spirit foreign to the world. How often are we told that His disciples understood not His sayings!—community of speech requires community of soul. Pentecost came, and the spirit of the Master became the spirit of the disciples, and with the entrance of His life they rose into a comprehension

of His language : words, which before had been to them empty and meaningless sounds, became fraught with a deep significance, and pregnant with truths of mighty import. In what particular form this speech of Pentecost was exhibited, it is not our province to inquire. Whether we say, with the majority of Christian commentators, that it was the knowledge of foreign tongues, or whether, with that minority which is headed by the historian Neander, we shall see fit to seek another solution, it must be manifest from Scripture itself that the particular form was intended to pass away. Already, in the days of the Gentile apostle, it is contemplated amongst the things which are perishable. But it points to a great fact, which is imperishable, which belongs to the essence of religion itself, and which can be verified by the experience of all times. It is the truth that Christianity has done more than any other power in this world to unloose the fountains of human eloquence, and to foster the revelation of man to man. It is here that the miracle finds its eternal moral significance. If it be true, as we have said, that the new element introduced by Christianity was the spirit of unselfishness, it was surely no inappropriate commencement for that spirit that it should inaugurate its mission by the gift of tongues. Language is the first instrument of unselfishness. The earliest words uttered by the lips of childhood mark the transition from the age of receiving to the age of giving ; for words are the vehicles of thought, and speech is the gift of thought from man to man. We are not surprised when, almost immediately after the Pentecostal

outpouring, we are told that these disciples had all things common ; they who without reserve can impart to each other the treasures of thought are already prepared for sharing the possessions of natural life. The age of brotherhood had begun, and the sense of individualism was dying. Hitherto the disciples had been divided against themselves by the recurrence of that question which had its source in personal ambition—‘Who shall be greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ But with Pentecost there woke into consciousness the reality of that great truth which as yet had been latent within them, that whosoever would be greatest must be servant of all. As the spirit of the new religion found vent in language, the disciple passed out of himself and entered into the heart of his brother. The joy of communion between soul and soul had its birth in that hour when thought responded to thought in the utterance of a common speech, and the first bonds were knit of that mighty Christian union, which all the powers of the world and all the vicissitudes of temporal history have been unable to break asunder.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE HOPES OF CHILDHOOD.

CHRISTIANITY has now entered upon its child-life, that is to say, it has passed from the stage of speechlessness into the stage of conscious and intelligent utterance. And the immediate effect of the transition is the sense of great joy. There is no expression more common than the phrase, 'happy childhood.' The opening of life is generally regarded as its period of most unmingled joy, nor is it unnatural that it should be so. The child has just come into possession of a power which is altogether new to it—the power of revealing itself in words; and no one can experience the sense of a new capacity within him without being awakened into a thrill of rapture. It was so with the young Church in the hour of its transition from the life of the infant into the life of the child—it woke up into joy. No man can pass from the perusal of the Old Testament into the perusal of the New without being immediately conscious of this change. Whatever be his views of inspiration, whether he look at these writings from the human or from the divine side, he cannot close his eyes to the fact that they appeal deeply to his nature; and if he will consider the subject carefully,

he will find that the records of the two dispensations affect him very differently. When we read the Old Testament, we are, in spite of ourselves, impressed with a sense of sadness. There is always a vague feeling that there is something wanting, something yet to come. How few of the Psalms exhibit unclouded gladness ! how many of them reveal the struggle between night and day, and transfer the experience of struggle from the heart of the writer into the heart of the reader !

But pass the boundary-line which divides the two dispensations, and we seem suddenly to have left the valley for the mountain, to have exchanged the shade for the sunshine. We are elevated at once into a joyous atmosphere, and we look upon the problems of life with a new and sanguine eye. The very opening of the scenery is all joyous,—the Magi bearing their Christmas gifts, and the shepherds tending in peace their flocks, and the voices of heavenly cheer proclaiming good-will to all mankind. And although the centre of the new religion is undoubtedly a cross, there is even here a radical difference between the standpoint of the two dispensations. Judaism had indeed shunned the cross as a mark of God's anger, but the cross cannot be avoided by the mere will of man ; the more it was avoided by men, the more pertinaciously did its shadow pursue them. Christianity approached the subject from an entirely opposite side ; it laid its hand upon the cross, and claimed it as its property. The dark shades of life are here not only admitted into the kingdom, but made the central figures of the king-



dom ; and so far from being viewed as the marks of divine anger, they are contemplated as the fore-runners of divine glory. The cross has become the road to the crown, and the sufferings of life open before the eye of the new worshipper only as the shady windings of an ascending avenue, whose path must issue in a stream of sunlight. Thus, by one of those strange transitions by which humanity sometimes reverses its own judgments, the objects from which the human spirit recoiled as calamitous are approached as the possible sources of a great prosperity, and the evils of existence are themselves compelled to minister to that burst of universal joy with which the world greeted the child-life of the Christian religion.

There was, however, another element, which strongly contributed to foster the joy of the early Christians. We have seen that they regarded the cross as only the road to the crown ; but in addition to that, they were powerfully sustained by the belief that the road itself was a very short one. Early Christianity lived in the future. The life of childhood is ever prospective ; it is far more attracted by the things of to-morrow than by the objects of to-day. The child-life of Christianity found also its highest brightness, not in the enjoyment of the passing hour, but in the anticipation of the coming hour ; and that anticipation was quickened and heightened by the persuasion that the coming of the hour would not be long delayed. From the moment that the visible presence of the Master was withdrawn, the attitude of the Christian Church was one of eager expectancy.

It never seems to have occurred to the early worshippers to regard this world as itself the field where Christianity should bloom. On the contrary, they looked upon this world as one looks upon a very aged man—beheld it as something about to die. Even while the first presence of the Master yet lingered with them, the interest of the disciples centred entirely in the future. ‘Wilt Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ ‘What shall be the sign of Thy coming?’ ‘Are there few that shall be saved?’ ‘Who shall be greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’

Already, at this early period, it was made apparent that the present work of the Master was not appreciated by His followers, and this want of appreciation was increased by the withdrawal of His visible presence. The true advent had not yet come; this manifestation had been only a momentary flash, intended to prepare the eye for a real and permanent coming. It had done nothing, it was meant to do nothing, it was only the forerunner of an approaching glory. The Master was coming back again in reality, and then, indeed, all things would be made new. All the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, were about to vanish, and on their ruins was to rise a kingdom that would never end,—a kingdom of purified Judaism, sacred yet visible, theocratic yet temporal, having its centre in the worship of the temple, but its circumference in the dominion of the earth. And the time was short. The forecast shadows of the kingdom might already be discerned approaching, and in a brief space its advent would

appear. Why, then, should they waste time in the thought of present things? Rank, wealth, fame, power, the refinements of art and the culture of secular education, were all in the hands of paganism, and therefore with paganism all these must perish. Let the Christian stand apart from this outer life of humanity; let him separate himself, even in thought, from this world's vicissitudes. What were its joys, what were its sorrows to him? Were not his hopes fixed upon the advent of a kingdom whose glory would dim all worldly pleasure, and neutralize all worldly pain; and might not the descent of that glory be expected any moment—it might be to-day, it might be to-morrow, it must be soon at the longest? Let him spend the brief interval that remained in preparing for its coming, in waiting for the consolation of Israel, in anticipating the joys of that morning which was about to dawn.

We have thus tried to figure forth in words what seems to us to have been the earliest attitude which the spirit of Christianity presented to this world; it was an attitude in which the most buoyant hopefulness for the future was coupled with the utmost despair for the present system of things. Let it not be imagined that there is any real analogy between this hope of the ancient Church, and that modern expectation of a reign of millennial glory which still glows in so many hearts. To both of them, indeed, there is one thing in common—the belief that the kingdom of God will again be manifested in this world by the visible return of its divine Founder. But here the resemblance between them ends, and

there begins not only a difference, but in one sense a positive contrast. We see no difficulty in conceiving that a man might firmly believe in modern millenarianism, and as firmly reject the millenarianism of ancient times. There are those who still look for a sudden, a speedy, and a visible advent of the kingdom of God; but what is the ground of their expectation? It is the belief that Christ's work is done, that the present has been made worthy of the future. The millenarianism of the first age—the millenarianism which preceded the publication of the sacred writings, and which continued to subsist in spite of the counteracting influence of these writings—was of a totally different order. It proceeded from the belief that Christ's work was not done, that the act of redemption was still to come.

If, like the writer of the Apocalypse, it sought a throne in the future, unlike the writer of the Apocalypse, it did not place the great Christian sacrifice in the centre of that throne. On the contrary, it was willing to break altogether with that earthly life of the Messiah which had passed away, was quite content to look upon it as if it had been a historical mistake, and to regard it for the future as void and null. This millenarianism strained its eye into the mist to catch some glimpse of the coming treasures; but it was altogether oblivious of the fact that the pearl of greatest price, and precisely that pearl which no advent of glory could purchase, was already lying at its feet. It had yet to learn that the emancipation of the human spirit is itself the greatest of all glories, and that any future manifestation of

the kingdom in its splendour must be rooted and grounded in its work of past humiliation.

Here, then, is the radical difference between the millenarianism of the nineteenth century and the millenarianism of opening Christianity. The former expects it because the greater fact of redemption is already come; the latter looked for it because the redemption is still expected. The former hopes for a millennial reign because it believes the present system of things to be ripening for its advent; the latter was confident in the same manifestation of glory because it believed the present system of things to be unworthy of continuance, and beyond the possibility of improvement. The former prepares for the coming manifestation by endeavouring to distribute through the world the seeds of spiritual truth; the latter recognised as the only practical preparation the fleeing from the world altogether, and the absorption of the spirit of man in thoughts which excluded all worldly interests and ties. The former is incomparably the higher, yet the latter was, we think, not unnatural to the child-life of a religion whose earthly side had its birthplace amid the Messianic hopes of Judaism. This depreciation of the present, this perpetual life in the future, was in reality the product of that influence of the home on the child which exerted so prominent a sway over the destinies of the early Church; and while, measured by the fruits of later advancement, it appears a faith miserable and meagre, it yet not unreasonably holds its place at the beginning of a course whose path was designed to be a progress from less to more. Nevertheless, it was inevitable



that this primitive state of feeling should be short-lived ; its continuance would have dwarfed the growth of the Christian Church. The complete disregard of present things was, while it lasted, a limit to that spirit of self-sacrifice which was the distinguishing characteristic of the new religion. As yet the child-life of Christianity had manifested its unselfishness only in its own family, and toward the members of its own household. The disciples had all things common amongst themselves, because each man looked upon his brother as the prospective member of a future kingdom of God. But the spirit of Christianity demanded a wider relationship than that; it desired to appropriate, not merely the kingdom of God which was coming, but that kingdom of the world which was already come. It aimed at the conquest of the world itself. It contemplated as its highest possible glory, not the destruction of old things and the creation of something new, but the making new of that which was old, the infusion of a new life into those forms which were ready to vanish away, the turning of the water of earth into the wine of heaven. And therefore the spirit of Christianity refused to accept those narrow limits which the Jewish culture of its first disciples had striven to impose on it. It refused to confine the range of its vision to any point in the future, however golden ; it claimed the present as its own, and proposed to make a heaven out of earth. As yet, its aims transcended its capacities. Before it there loomed a grand ideal, and it saw clearly that its destiny was the creation of a brotherhood, not merely national, but human.

Yet how often does the ideal of childhood outrun its possibilities; how great are its presentiments in contrast with the feebleness of its powers! The spirit of Christianity was as yet only a child; it had a clear vision of something higher than childhood, but it could not at once draw near and make the vision a tangible reality. The soil of its birth was for the present too strong for it; it had been born amidst national prejudices, and it wanted strength to shake them off. Before any progress could be made, before it could even learn the richness of its own nature, there was something which must be rooted out to give it room to grow, and that was the influence of home. Home-life must not be allowed to absorb the whole interest of the opening soul, else that soul will inevitably be unfitted for the work of the world. Christianity was in danger of centring so closely around its birthplace as to exclude from its sympathies every other spot on earth, and the only mode of averting this danger was the loosening of its domestic ties. This, therefore, was to be God's discipline for the early Church, and, like all kinds of discipline, it must for the present be not joyous, but grievous. The spirit of Christianity must be drawn by a series of influences to the practice of that high vocation which already in theory it perceived to be its destined goal. The child must be weaned from its parent, its sympathies must be alienated from the place of its birth and the home of its first affections. The horizon of its vision must be broadened. It must be lifted from the region of airy hope into the really loftier sphere of practical work and beneficent action,

must be taught to look upon this lower world itself with an eye at once more kindly and more sanguine, and must be led to discover the objects of its brotherhood, not in the members of a mere Jewish theocracy, but in all in whom it could recognise the stamp of a common humanity. Such was to be the next transition-stage in the education of the Christian life, and already those influences were preparing which were to effect the change. The hour of emancipation was at hand, and the man was coming with the hour. He was coming from the very ranks of Judaism, from the very hotbed of national prejudice and bigotry. Christianity was to receive its enlargement, not from the mystical light of Essenism, nor yet from the cosmopolitan breadth of the Sadducee, but from the very heart of that Pharisaic life which had set itself in the most rigid antagonism to the doctrines of the Cross. From this innermost home of the spirit of Judaism, the spirit of Christianity was to derive a force and energy whose results are even yet far from exhausted; and from the ruins of the crumbling temple was to emerge a leader of surpassing power, whose work was destined to overturn the basis of the temple worship.

## CHAPTER VII.

### BREAKING-UP OF HOME ASSOCIATIONS.

THERE are some men whose peculiar fortune it is to occupy the boundary-line between two worlds,—the world which is passing away, and the world which is dawning. The lives of such men are almost inevitably sad, for they are separated from the sympathies alike of the old and of the new. They have one foot on the threshold of the past, and the other on the margin of the future; but in neither past nor future are they permitted fully to participate, and the very hesitation of their hearts between the love of that which is dying, and the devotion to that which is newly born, prevents them from reaping on either side a harvest of perfect joy. Perhaps at no time were the boundary-lines of two worlds more distinctly marked than in the first century of the Christian era. Side by side with each other stood buoyant youth and tottering age, and the natural characteristics of each were heightened by the contrast they presented standing in such close proximity. The minds of men struggled on which side to range themselves. It may appear a strange thing, it has appeared a strange thing, that, with so marked a contrast presented to their view, they should ever for a moment

have wavered in their choice, should ever have hesitated in preferring strength to decrepitude and vigour to decay. But those who reason thus forget that the human mind has often a tendency to become attracted towards objects just in proportion as these objects begin to fade from its possession. That very reverence for antiquity which exists more or less in every noble mind, has, we believe, its root in this law of our nature. Many a man finds more pleasure in contemplating the ruins of an old castle than in beholding the most splendid exhibitions of modern architectural skill ; and the ivy clinging to the ruined wall has for some a much greater attraction than the plant which grows and luxuriates in the nurture of soil and sunshine. We need not be surprised, therefore, that the decrepitude alike of the pagan and of the Jewish world was with many minds a source rather of attraction than of repulsion. It called into life that feeling of loyalty which is so closely allied to the sentiment of religion, and which disposed them not to desert in the hour of danger that empire under whose flag they had served during so many prosperous years. Of Christianity itself they as yet knew nothing, except that it was something very wonderful and very new. But neither wonder nor novelty can avail to subjugate the heart of man ; and as long as the religion of the Cross was seen only by the outward eye, it is not surprising that it was unable to eradicate the devotion to those early forms of faith whose very ruin and decay revealed their advanced age and their venerable antiquity.

Pre-eminently amongst those whose lot was cast



in this transition time stands out the figure of Saul of Tarsus. His biography is so well known to us, that it almost seems as if we had lived through his experience. In many respects his life is an abridgment of the life of Christianity in the world, for we can trace in his single personality nearly all those stages of development through which the collective Church was called to pass. It may not, therefore, be uninteresting to follow for a little the course of this life, so rich in its results, so important in its issues. At the period when he was first brought into contact with the spirit of Christianity, he was one of the strictest representatives of the most rigid of Jewish parties, being by descent and education a Pharisee. It is quite possible that descent and education constituted the sole reasons for his adoption of this faith. It is quite possible that the very feeling of loyalty to which we have alluded may have kept him from inquiring into the grounds of his belief. Pharisaism was identical with patriotism; it was the desire to perpetuate the institutions of his country. These institutions were rapidly melting away beneath the rays of a powerful sun, and it is probable that to Saul of Tarsus the fact of his country's adversity would alone be a sufficient incentive to cling to its tottering fabric. His religious belief had come down to him as an heirloom; it was a relic of the past, soiled by its transmission through the ages, and exhibiting unmistakable traces of decay, but on that very account the more precious to its possessor. We believe it was this sense of its antiquity, this identification

of Pharisaism with the very constitution of his country, which prompted Saul so vehemently to embrace it. We believe that his original hatred to Christianity proceeded exclusively from the notion that Christianity was in some way or other opposed to the nationality of Judaism—in other words, that the question was at first with him rather a political than a religious one. That he had ever seriously examined the claims of the new religion we see no reason to suppose. There are some, indeed, who have thought they can detect the evidence of an inward struggle in the words, ‘It is hard for thee to kick against the goads.’ But the application of the passage is strained and unnatural. Saul of Tarsus would never have struggled for a moment between the old light and the new ; he would at once have accepted Christianity if he had permitted himself to look at it. But he did not permit himself to look at it ; he regarded it as something treasonable, and therefore as not only unworthy of examination, but worthy of the severest persecution. It was to him the spark of an incipient fire, which, if suffered to progress, would inevitably destroy the very foundations of national government, and reduce to ashes the most time-honoured institutions of his country ; and it was therefore to him a thing to be stamped out instantaneously and sternly, ere ever it had succeeded in igniting the world’s ancient fabric. Nor was Saul of Tarsus the man to rest in a mere theory ; he was of too earnest a nature for that. Whenever the conviction gained possession of his mind that Christianity ought to be eradicated, it immediately became his duty to be

an instrument in its eradication. The same burning zeal which made Paul the apostle foremost in the ranks of the persecuted, made Saul of Tarsus foremost in the ranks of the persecutors. It was, indeed, his peculiar lot to be the leader in the first great national movement against the life of the new religion—that same religion of which he himself was destined to be one of the brightest ornaments. Yet, strange to say, in his very persecution of Christianity, Saul of Tarsus might be called an unconscious missionary.

The work set apart for him in the Christian Church was the breaking-up of home associations, and, paradoxical as it may seem, he began that work when he consented to the death of Stephen. The first Christian martyr came not from the fold of Judaism, but from the midst of the Gentile converts; the first exhibition of heroic self-sacrifice which emanated from the spirit of Christianity proceeded from one who was not of the stock of Abraham. The spectacle could not fail to exalt the Gentiles; it showed that great possibilities were slumbering in the midst of them. It pointed already to the truth that the Christian spirit was not dependent upon local or national circumstances, and that its influence might be felt in regions where the temple and the Sanhedrim were unknown. And the man who was the instrument of revealing this truth was Saul of Tarsus—Saul the persecutor, in the very act of persecution. Unknown to himself, he was beginning to be the apostle of the Gentiles in that hour when he afforded the opportunity to Stephen of displaying what religious force could exist outside the limits of his native land. That persecution broke the

spell of Judaism, inflicted upon it a blow from which it never wholly recovered. There came a time when there arose a new hierarchy within the bosom of the Christian Church, presenting in many of its features an analogy to the temple worship. But the old Judaism never revived ; it received its death-blow in the hour of the first Gentile martyrdom, and the hand that dealt the stroke was the unconscious hand of him who, at that very moment, was striving to give it strength and stability.

And now, in the very heart of the persecution, there occurs a startling change ; the sword drops from the grasp of the leader. For the first time in his life he had a vision of Christianity. Hitherto he had never seen it ; it had been to him only a political creed of very dangerous tendency, but all at once it burst upon his view in the centre of his path. It presented itself to his mind not in the form of a system, but in a flash of light ; not in an abstraction of the reason, but in a voice to the heart ; not in the force of a dogma, but in the power of a personal life : he saw it as it had appeared in the history of its divine Founder. And the moment his eye had rested upon Christianity as it was, the moment he beheld it apart from all political aspects, that instant he approved and accepted it. There was not the slightest struggle, not the smallest hesitation ; it came to him as a new light, and he no more thought of shutting his eyes to it than he would have thought of closing them against the morning sun. When he met it face to face, it seemed to be the very life of which his whole being stood in need ; the old nature of the man died



instantaneously ; Saul of Tarsus fell to the earth, and Paul the apostle arose in his room.

Nevertheless it would, we think, be a mistake to suppose that the full vision of the light was accompanied by a full vision of the truth. We know that in every department light takes precedence of truth. We see the operation of natural laws before we can understand these laws ; we feel the action of our mental powers ere ever we have analyzed these powers, or even given them a name. Nor does it seem to us that the world of religious thought should form any exception to the rule. There is no contradiction in supposing that a man may be thoroughly transformed by the power of Christianity, and yet not immediately arrive at the full comprehension of Christian doctrine ; and such we believe to have been the case with Saul of Tarsus. The light touched his spiritual nature and acted instantaneously ; the truth had to permeate his rational nature, and therefore it advanced by development. As he merged into Christianity from the very heart of Judaism, and as the earliest form of Christianity presented some point of contact to Judaism, it is not unnatural to suppose that he accepted it in this form. He tells us himself that originally he knew Christ after the flesh—that is to say, thought of Him, after the manner of the earliest Christians, rather in relation to His coming work than in relation to that work which was already done. He, like the other disciples, began his spiritual life in the contemplation of the future rather than in the meditation on the past, and dwelt more on the glory that should be revealed than on the glory which



was revealed already. His very conception of the future kingdom seems to have shared in the physical bias of his age. Long years afterwards, when he wrote the Epistle to the Galatians, he looked back upon this period of his life as a stage which he had surmounted; for in a passage of that epistle he appears distinctly to indicate that, like the other apostles, he had begun his ministry by preaching Christianity in connection with circumcision (Gal. v. 11). Nor do we think that, from this earliest stage of Christianity, he was permitted to pass by an immediate transition into the full light of liberty.

The next great period of his intellectual history opens with the first General Council of the Christian Church,—that Council of Jerusalem which is of more interest to the student of sacred annals than the assemblies of Nice, and Ephesus, and Chalcedon, because its decrees proceeded from the mind of the Church itself, and not from the dictum of an external authority. At this council it for the first time was made apparent that a rent had begun to appear in the unity of the Christian life. The new religion had, by its very nature, been adapted for all lands, yet it was impossible that all lands should receive it in the same way. The Jew had naturally striven to take up into its light as many monuments of his native country as would not absolutely disgrace that light; but the Gentile had no motive which could impel him to reverence the institutions of the Jew. The descendant of Abraham, when impelled to embrace Christianity, not only held fast by circumcision, but insisted that the Gentile converts should hold fast by it too;

the Gentile, on the other hand, protested against such a doctrine, and appealed to the collective Church in support of his protest. And in defence of that appeal stood forth Paul. He appeared in the Council of Jerusalem as the advocate of Gentile liberty, and here for the first time gave indication of his destined work. We do not think, however, that even yet his eyes had been opened to the full length and breadth of that work. It seemed to him a grievous thing that a Gentile should be forced to become a Jew before he could become a Christian, but it does not appear to have occurred to him that the Jew himself was no longer bound by the rites of his ancient worship. He saw, and saw clearly, that circumcision was no necessary part of the new order of things, that even an Israelite was only compelled to observe it by reason of a past command. But we think he did not yet see that, alike from the Gentile and from the Israelite, all compulsion was taken away, that henceforth the old form of worship had become an obsolete and a profitless thing. Nevertheless the mind of Saul of Tarsus had already made a vast stride in spiritual progress; it had virtually burst the bonds of nationality when it claimed for the Gentile nations an independent entrance. And the Church, too, had made a stride, for it acceded to its apostle's claim. A few years before, such a concession would have been impossible; and the fact that a Christian council should have been constrained to make it is alone the strongest proof of the permeating power of Christianity. Already at this early date the spirit of brotherhood was asserting itself, and successfully asserting

itself, over the spirit of isolation, and that Church whose members had been nurtured in the very lap of Judaism, stretched forth its arms to embrace the inhabitants of other climes.

And now Paul is set apart for that great work to which he was destined, the separation of the stream from its parent fountain. When that Council of Jerusalem closes, he goes forth upon a new missionary journey, more important and more momentous than all his previous labours. His earliest mission had been confined to Arabia; his next had embraced a wider circuit, but had still been limited to the surrounding nations of Asia; he was now to enter Europe. And the entrance into Europe meant much; it signified the transition from Eastern movelessness into Western progress. When Paul passed over that frontier, he passed, if not into a new state of things, at least into the capacity for something new, for the descendants of Japheth have always manifested a tendency to outrun the sons of Shem. And it was inevitable that a mind like that of Paul, a mind which already had received an impulse to advance, should have been peculiarly influenced by the contact with Western civilisation. It was impossible that such a man should continue long in that comparatively negative position in which he had been placed by the Council of Jerusalem. He must ere long come to see, that if the spirit of Christianity be adapted for all lands, it must be able to dispense with the national peculiarities of any, and that therefore the Jew as well as the Gentile had a claim to Christian liberty.

At what time this full conviction burst on him, we

cannot say; but it breaks forth with clearest light in that Epistle to the Galatians, in which he tells his followers that Christianity is the advent of a new life, and that circumcision and uncircumcision are equally unavailing. And when he stands amidst the Athenians upon Mars' hill, there is not a trace of his old life remaining. In that hour we see him realizing to its full extent the length and the breadth of that liberty to which Christianity had invited the human spirit. He addresses this cultured audience no longer in the strain of an adversary, but in the language of one who has much in common with themselves; and, like a skilful tactician, he seizes the point of unity before he advances to the marks of difference. In the very key-note of his speech he strikes a chord in which there is something of commendation mingled with the necessary rebuke. 'I perceive, ye Athenians, that in all things ye are over-religious; so religious, that you are constrained to worship a being whom you confess to be unknown to you.' Such, in spirit, is the prelude to his exhortation, and the apparent concession involved in it indicates the hand of a master. But he advances a step farther, and makes a greater concession still. He tells them that the God whom they worship is the very same Being whom he himself adores; that the difference between him and his audience lies not in the object of their adoration, but only in the relative clearness of their vision. 'Him whom ye ignorantly worship, declare I unto you.' Still progressing in his enumeration of the points of unity, the Apostle of the Gentiles strikes a bolder note; he proclaims the sentiment of universal brother-



hood. He declares that this God whom he serves consciously, and whom they serve ignorantly, is alike the Father of all; that He has made all nations of one blood, and appointed to each the bounds of its habitation. Think not, he virtually says, that I claim any special privilege because my youth has been nurtured in the worship of the temple of Jerusalem; the Being whom you and I reverence is no respecter of places any more than of persons. He dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped with the work of men's hands; the spirit of the worshipper is His most hallowed sanctuary. And then, in grand harmony with the whole, he goes on to exhibit the essential nearness of the divine to the human. It is no longer the God of Judaism he proclaims—no longer the God who dwells afar off in the realms of infinite space, and who can only be approached through the mediation of angels—but One in whom, by reason of a common parentage, Jew and Gentile alike live and move and have their being. The God whom he discloses to the Athenians is a Being pervading all His works, participating in the very nature of the objects He has made, and Himself a sharer in the life of His whole creation; and to endear the truth yet more strongly to the hearts of his auditors, the Gentile apostle illustrates it by a quotation, not from the scriptures of Judea, but from the poetry of their own Grecian literature.

Now this speech is admitted, even by those who question the genuineness of the narrative, to be thoroughly in harmony with the developed Pauline spirit, and therefore in every point of view it is



valuable to the church historian. The whole tenor of the speech is in the direction of Gentilism. It aims at the obliteration of all religious distinctions between the converts from the Jewish temple and the converts from the schools of Greek philosophy, and in this it certainly transcends that range of vision contemplated by the Council of Jerusalem. The dictum of that council was, that there *should* be distinctions; the mind of Paul himself did not at the time see farther, but the course of his later development rendered it no longer possible for him to rest in such a decision. He felt that, to be consistent with the spirit of his religion, he must proclaim not only that the Gentiles were free, but that the liberty of the Gentiles ought to be claimed by every follower of Christ. And the result of this proclamation was what might be supposed; there were already two different parties in the Church, there now arose two hostile parties. Hitherto they had agreed to differ; they now made their difference a ground of quarrel. That this breach in Christian fellowship extended to the apostles themselves, that it produced any spirit of enmity between Paul and his brethren in the apostolic ministry, we for our part do not believe. The passages quoted in support of such a view are capable of a very different and a far more natural interpretation, and would never have suggested the idea to a mind not previously imbued with it. Yet it is not difficult to understand how each of these apostolic teachers should have gathered around himself a little band of fervent admirers, not difficult to see how the adherents of each should seek to exalt him over the

other ; and as there was confessedly a difference in their form of teaching, it is by no means surprising that a controversy, which was originally one of mere personal partiality, should develop into one of doctrinal disunion.

Perhaps nowhere did this strife of parties run so high as in the Church of Corinth ; here the tendencies of the ecclesiastical world were all represented in miniature. So wide had become the gulf between Jew and Gentile, that there was found room for something intermediate between them. Paul himself, in one of his epistles to the Church of Corinth, has distinguished four parties,—those who held by his own ministry, those who adhered to the teaching of Apollos, those who adopted the standpoint of Peter, and those, probably the followers of James, who called themselves the party of Christ. It is difficult at this distance of time precisely to define these parties, but it seems to us that they would not be inaptly described by adopting four names from the sphere of modern politics,—the Tory, the Conservative, the Liberal, and the Coalitionist. The Tory formed that faction which called itself the party of Christ, using the word Christ in its old Jewish sense of Messiah ; it comprehended that portion of the Christian Church which was most opposed to Gentile innovation. The Conservative section comprehended the followers of Peter ; it leaned towards a Jewish Christianity, but was not disposed to resist to the uttermost the tide of Christian liberty. The Liberal ranks embraced the adherents of Paul, and their position is too well known to

require further elucidation. But in the midst of these conflicting parties, different from any, and yet aiming at the union of all, stood the Coalitionists, the followers of Apollos. They contemplated an amalgamation of these hostile elements, not so much by solving the question as by shelving the question. They did not profess to decide between the claims of Jew and Gentile, but they asked Jew and Gentile to unite in the pursuance of a higher end, to leave the elements of truth and press on to reach its full development. They perceived, and truly perceived, that Christianity opened to the human mind the prospect of a new intellectual life,—a life which must penetrate every department of knowledge, and affect man's relation to the universe itself. They saw that, while the parties of the Christian Church were contending for the relative merits of circumcision and uncircumcision, there were waiting to be solved by each of them problems of momentous interest, and problems which hitherto had admitted of no solution ; and they called upon the hostile factions to suspend their strife, and to merge their disagreement upon that which was temporal in Christianity in the pursuit of that which was essential and eternal. The attitude of these Coalitionists was not unlike the attitude of Erasmus to Luther in the sixteenth century—not unlike the position which in the Elizabethan age the spirit of the Renaissance presented to the spirit of Puritanism. The party of Apollos, steering apart from the stormy aspect of either shore, selected a path of calm and sunshine, and made for a neutral haven. It looked at Christianity for the first time as

*See in C.*

a mental force, a power which would contribute to the world's culture and civilisation, and which would impart a new impulse of animation to the efforts of human intelligence—diffusing knowledge, exalting imagination, quickening the desire for research, deepening the resources of reflection, and enlarging the horizon of a noble ambition. This intellectual renaissance, which accompanies every religious reformation, was already in the first Christian century making itself felt in the world, and in a few brief years it was to dominate the mind of Christendom. The disciples of Apollos, originally the smallest in number and the most insignificant in pretensions, were to form the nucleus of one of the noblest Churches this world has ever seen—a Church defective, indeed, when measured by the standard of contemporary formulas, and occasionally prone to swerve from the even path by the very excess of that life which dwelt within it, yet withal high in its aims and pure in its motives, and intensely spiritual in the depth of its being,—we mean the Church of Alexandria. If, through the force of its own spirituality, it was liable at times to mistake personal impressions for universal truths; if, through its excessive absorption in the thought of unseen things, it sometimes substituted the realm of fancy for the world of sober reality, the very error leant to virtue's side, and constituted a healthy counterpoise to the materialism of a sensuous age. This was to be the Church of the immediate future, the dispensation which was to follow the present years of warfare. Already, in the course of history, there was preparing

a series of causes which should ultimately sweep from the field its earliest and most bigoted occupant. The days of the Judaic party were indeed nearly numbered ; and it was manifest that if the course of Christian progress was to be resisted at all, it must be resisted on wider grounds than the associations of Jewish antiquity. These associations were themselves rapidly dispelling, and a conjunction of circumstances was ere long to destroy them altogether. Into the investigation of these causes of dissolution we propose to enter in the succeeding chapter.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### EXTINCTION OF HOME ASSOCIATIONS.

THERE was one ever progressive cause which, more than all others, contributed to the decline of Judaic Christianity. Nothing in human history is more remarkable than the rapidity with which the new religion diffused itself through the nations, yet it must not be overlooked that its propagation was far more successful amongst the Gentiles than amongst the Jews. At first sight this may seem unnatural. On a superficial view, it might appear that Judaism, with its monotheism and its Messianic hopes, had far more affinity with the religion of Christ than Gentilism, with its many gods and its want of a historical goal. But while undoubtedly in these respects the Jew had the advantage, that advantage was more than counterbalanced by the superior culture of the Gentile nations. Rome had conquered Greece by arms, and had become mistress of the world by physical power; but Greece had conquered Rome by civilisation, and had become mistress of the world by mental power. The nations of the Gentiles had been thus not only moulded into unity, but moulded into one common culture, and for this reason

they were prepared for the reception of Christianity in a way to which Judea was a stranger.

We have already said that the Jews were not a people secularly cultured, and probably it was just on this account that they were selected for their special mission; the treasure was the more marked because it was hid in earthen vessels. But while their want of secular refinement fitted them for their own place in history, it pre-eminently unfitted them for an immediate appropriation of Christianity. The Christian religion speaks with greatest force to the most developed minds. We hear the question often asked, Why were the proselytes of the first century so much more numerous than those of our day? It will not suffice to answer this question by referring to the cessation of miracles; for it so happens that the Christian missionary of the nineteenth century claims the same promise of support which was claimed by the Christian apostle of the first. We suspect the reason must be sought in a human rather than in a divine deficiency. We are apt to forget that the world of heathendom is not now the world of mental development; Christianity has gathered around itself the products of art and literature, and those nations which have refused to receive its light have in great measure been bereft of even their own natural light. But in the first century of the Christian Church it was altogether the reverse. The Gentile world, which then represented heathendom, was in possession of by far the largest portion of the light of nature, and exhibited the human mind in its highest stages of education and culture. The heathen audiences to

whom the first disciples preached were generally, in matters of secular thought, in advance of their instructors, and therefore there were many amongst them who arrived at the apprehension of Christian truth far more rapidly than had these disciples themselves. And precisely for the same reason, the progress of Christianity at large embraced a far greater number of converts from amongst the Gentiles than from amongst the Jews; the superior development of the former gave them a receptivity unknown to the latter. Hence, from that day when Paul went forth on his own peculiar mission, the Gentile Christians ever more and more outnumbered their Judaic opponents, until the power and influence of the one almost swallowed up the insignificance of the other, and admitted no further possibility of an equal field of battle. Even if there had been no extraneous circumstances to accelerate the fall of the extreme conservative party, that fall would still have been an absolute certainty, for it is not in the nature of things that the few should long contend against the many.

But there were extraneous circumstances, and one of them was an incident which, at the time, appeared pre-eminently unfavourable to the propagation of Christianity in general, and of Gentile Christianity in particular—we mean the imprisonment of Paul at Rome. It had all along been the design of the great apostle to visit the capital of the world, but up to a late stage of his missionary labours that design was unaccomplished; and when it was accomplished, its fulfilment was brought about in a manner not contemplated by himself—he went, not as a missionary, but as a pri-

soner. Yet we are not sure that even his personal mission was not really promoted by the adverse circumstances which surrounded it. Had he come voluntarily to Rome, he might have been received as a rival to that Jewish Christianity which had already found its way thither ; but when he came as a captive, he was sure to be listened to with that respect which ever follows a man suffering for a cause which he believes to be true. We have said that in Rome the missionary field had been preoccupied by the Jewish Christians ; we gather this not so much from any positive historical statements, as from an inference derived from such statements. We know that there were Christians in Rome before Paul visited it, for this is attested by one of his most powerful compositions. We know also that, in that composition, he labours to establish the relation between the old covenant and the new ; and the fact that he attached so much importance to this explanation seems to indicate that he knew where his readers had received their bias. It is, moreover, a tradition prevalent throughout Christendom, that Peter was intimately connected with the Christian Church at Rome. That he was ever recognised as Bishop of Rome is a statement unsupported by history ; that he was ever within the walls of the city is by no means an established fact ; yet the circumstance that his name has been so constantly associated with it undoubtedly points to the conclusion that the first Roman Church was Petrine, and not Pauline, Judaic, and not Gentile. It would have been strange, indeed, if the Jewish party in the Christian Church had not en-

deavoured to plant a colony in the very capital of the world. The first disciples were peculiarly alive to the advantages of cities over villages; they knew that any doctrine would derive double power by emanating from a wide centre of civilisation, and therefore their earliest missions were directed to the chief towns of every province. Rome was the very metropolis of civilisation, the centre of all life, and the fountain of every stream, and no religious system could hope to take root in the world of that day unless it had been nourished by that great source of vitality. It was to Rome, accordingly, that Judaic Christianity looked for a permanent resting-place, and here at a very early date it strove to establish itself.

But if the first form of the Roman Church was Petrine, its second was assuredly Pauline. We have no account of these two years which the Gentile apostle spent in the great city, but we know that they must have been years of genuine work and fruitful influence; so influential as to root up the labours of Jewish Christianity, and to sow in their room the seeds of religious liberty. And our reason for knowing it is this: when Paul passed from the scene, the man who rose into his place was one of his own followers, not a follower of Peter; it was that Clement whom tradition assigns a place amongst the earliest of Roman bishops, and who is probably identical with him whose name Paul declares to be written in the book of life. If so strong a supporter of the Pauline party was allowed to occupy so exalted a position in the estimation of metropolitan Christians, it seems impossible to resist the conclusion that Peter was not



at this period the dominant apostle in the Roman Church—impossible to avoid the inference that Paul had succeeded in planting the seeds of Gentile liberty in the most fruitful soil of the ancient world. The Christianity of the Gentiles was rapidly obtaining a position of strength and influence in the very heart of the empire, and that influence was ere long to be confirmed and quickened by an event of great historical interest.

For the clouds are now gathering in the west, and the religion of Christ is about to encounter the greatest storm which has yet assailed it. For the first time in its history, it is brought into hostile collision with the imperial power of Rome. It is true, Christianity was not even yet attacked on account of its distinctive doctrines; in other words, it was not yet obnoxious by reason of that which made it Christianity. The Roman state was tolerant to all forms of religious belief, provided only that those forms would consent to nestle under its own shadow. There is a tradition that Tiberius Cæsar was willing to have enrolled Christ among the gods, and though we think it without foundation, it points to the true state of feeling in the capital. The offence of Christianity in the eyes of Rome was simply that it would not consent to have its Founder enrolled amongst the gods. Christianity aimed at an empire as universal as that of the Cæsars, and would submit to have neither superior nor rival. And this in that day amounted to treason. In the first Christian centuries, Church and State were not merely united, but one. Strictly speaking, there was no Church, the State

absorbed everything. Religious rites were political laws, and religious heresies were political crimes. A form of belief which refused to have any dealings with the existing worship was in the same position as would be any party in a nation which set up the standard of rebellion against regal authority. Hence the persecutions which Christianity endured from imperial Rome proceeded from the same source as the persecutions which it endured from Pharisaic Judea, from failing to discriminate between its inward spirit and that political framework which accidentally encompassed it. If Christianity was in opposition to the existing power of states, it was because that existing power was directed to the suppression of virtue; its political attitude was a mere temporary aspect, which would change with the change of circumstances. This, however, the Roman empire had yet to learn. It had yet to be awakened to the truth that this religion was of a self-surrendering rather than of a resistant nature, and unfortunately it only could be awakened to that truth by beholding the spirit of Christianity through the medium of those very persecutions by which it compassed its destruction.

And the first of these was about to come. While the Gentile apostle was proclaiming in bonds that truth which is the source of all liberty, the mind of the capital was startled from its Epicurean apathy by the appearance of a great conflagration. It was manifestly not the result of accident, and the terror of the conspiracy was less easily extinguished than the fire. There is little doubt now, there was probably in high quarters little doubt then, that the hand

which lit the torch was that of Nero. The name of this man has been loaded with such infamy, and the acts attributed to him are of so monstrous a character, that some commentators have not scrupled to regard him as the antichrist of the Apocalypse. But, in truth, Nero could not even have been an antichrist on principle. He would have supported Christianity with all his heart, if Christianity had supported him in his despotism; he hated the Romans as much as the Christians, and for precisely the same reason, because the instinct of both was towards liberty. The old republican spirit of the great city was not wholly dead, and its people were not yet prepared for slavery. Nero knew this, and he hated his subjects for that reminiscence which they retained of a brighter past. He felt that the very existence of Rome, presenting as it did such a monument of antiquity, was an obstacle in his path to absolute power. He saw that no despotism would be successful as long as the walls of that proud city recalled to the minds of its inhabitants the association of so many centuries of stainless glory, and he resolved to reduce to ashes all this magnificent structure, so rich in the treasures gathered in bygone days. The attempt was made; the execution fell short of the design, but there followed a great consternation, and a dreadful sense of mystery. It was necessary that suspicion should be diverted from its natural channel, and it so happened that another channel opportunely presented itself. The perpetrator of the crime accused the Christians, and the prevalent misconception of the Christian principle lent colour to the

charge. Besides, is it not possible that the imprisonment of Paul may have suggested a plausible motive for the commission of such a deed? What more natural than that the friends of the Gentile apostle should seek to release him from captivity by consuming the walls of his dungeon? Whatever may have been the grounds of the accusation, it is certain that for a time the populace believed it. Ever inflammable, they rose simultaneously to seek revenge. The cry for blood reverberated from Rome through the surrounding districts, and those in high places of command probably instituted a judicial persecution, to avoid the horror of a wholesale massacre. The cruelties of that persecution cannot even at this day be read without loathing, but into a description of these it is neither our desire nor our province to enter. We deal with these events only in so far as they conduced to the real progress of Christianity, and we think it can be shown that even this bitter trial did exert such an influence. It stirred up into something like a resurrection-life that spirit of self-sacrifice which had grown cold through the disputations of rival schools; and in so doing, it exhibited to the Roman world a higher evidence of the religious truth than could have been reached by a hundred miracles, or by a thousand apologies. It enabled the Christians, through that spirit which it elicited, to disprove the accusation by a stronger witness than that of any legal *alibi*, for it showed that in any place and at any time, the crime imputed to these men would in the nature of things be to them impossible. The spectacle of martyrs in the cause of

One whose memory they loved, and in whose service they feared not to die; the spectacle of a death in which the sacrifice of self was blended with the thought for the welfare of others, including even that of the enemies who were inflicting it, could not fail by its very contrast to preach an eloquent sermon to the Roman people. And when the first ferment subsided, we can well believe that over the mind of that people there would come a great reaction. It would ere long appear that for once at least in their history the Roman populace and the followers of Christ were sufferers in one common cause, martyrs under one common despotism.

That such a reaction did take place, that the Roman came to look upon the Christian with a more kindly eye, inasmuch as they were both the objects of one tyrant's persecution, there is, we think, some reason to believe. It must have been shortly after this that the great apostle of the Gentiles was brought to that trial for whose verdict he had appealed to Cæsar, and for whose coming he had to wait so long. What this verdict was, it is impossible at such a distance to determine with dogmatism, but it seems to us that the weight of the argument preponderates on the side of those who hold that Paul was acquitted. And if it be so, it assuredly marks a strong change in public feeling. At that outbreak of the persecution which immediately followed the conflagration, we are unable to conceive how the leader of the Christians could have escaped; and the fact that on this occasion he did escape, appears to us strongly to favour the idea that a reaction had taken place in popular



sympathy. At all events, we have every reason to believe that from this Roman captivity Paul went forth again upon his missionary wanderings, and that with him went forth, with an increase of vital power, that spirit of Gentile Christianity which in him was personified. A Christianity which had been able to stand face to face with Cæsar, to brave the horrors of the Roman tribunal, and to come out victorious from the trial, was certain to command a respect greater than it had hitherto awakened. Accordingly, in the fourth and last mission of the great apostle, it almost seems to us as if we could catch in his words a tone of new authority; not the authority, indeed, of one who claims a superiority in power, but that rather of a man old and venerable, whom long experience gives a right to speak to his children. In these pastoral epistles which intervene between his first captivity and his death, we are struck with that air of weight and dignity which pervades his counsels, and we are irresistibly forced to the conclusion, that whatever of doubt or uncertainty may have at first surrounded his apostolic claims has been long since dissipated and forgotten in the admiration of a life which has proved its Christianity by suffering. We regret that over his last years history throws a veil; we should have liked to have followed him through his latest journey, and on even to the end. Whether, as tradition asserts, his footsteps were imprinted on the shores of our island, we cannot tell; but it needs no national association to perfect our interest in Paul. His last acts, like the acts of his whole ministry, were unselfish. As long as we retain a view of him, we

see him organizing for future ages those churches he has planted, and to us the spectacle is strikingly significant. It shows us that whatever expectation Paul may at one time have entertained of Christ's immediate advent had now passed away. He no longer looked for a visible manifestation of the kingdom which should be accomplished in his own lifetime; he felt that he must depart, and that others must enter into the fruit of his labours. He sought, therefore, to employ the brief time that remained in lightening the burdens of those who should come after him, in reducing to order all that was chaotic, and in imparting perfect symmetry to all that was undeveloped. He wanted to leave the young Church fixed upon some stable basis, and supported in its internal structure against all storms from without and enemies from within, and for the accomplishment of this end he strove faithfully and earnestly up to the close. His personal superintendence was, indeed, of short duration. There came ere long a second captivity, from which he found no release until he went forth to crown a life of unselfishness by a death of martyrdom. There are some who tell us that he sealed his testimony with his blood at the same time with Peter; and if so, there is something beautiful in the coincidence. These men had represented different parties, and by their respective followers had been held up to one another in the attitude of opposition; it was surely fitting that at the last the difference should be dwarfed in the agreement, and that both should proclaim, by a simultaneous death, the unity of their love and loyalty. Bravely and

earnestly they had struggled for the same end, each in his own way had approached one common goal ; and there was not wanting a grandeur in that closing scene which showed the beholding world that their hearts were one.

With Peter expired almost the last association which bound Christianity to the memories of home ; two years more, and the last itself had expired. Jerusalem was destroyed, and that national history, which had been marked by so much glory and so much shame, closed in a tragedy of horrors. Henceforth the names of Jew and Gentile merge into the wider names of East and West, and the old landmarks are gradually washed away. In the West, Pauline Christianity burned on ; in the East, the relics of home supplied for a little the place of home itself. The controversy of circumcision and uncircumcision degenerated into the controversy regarding the observance of Easter—a dispute which has, indeed, exerted a powerful influence upon the discussions of modern Germany, but which contributed absolutely nothing to the development of the age which produced it. Once, and once only, it seemed as if Judea might rise from its ashes ; it was in that hour when Barcochba raised the standard of revolt against the Roman eagles ; but the attempt, begun in folly, ended in bloodshed and desolation. As for Jewish Christianity, it was left so far behind in the race of spiritual progress, that ultimately it was looked upon as a heresy, and men called it Ebionism, or the poor religion. To speak as a child is in a child natural and proper, but in a man

it is a sign of imbecility. To worship the Christ after the flesh, the Christ who was to restore the majesty of the Jewish name, was in the infancy of the Christian religion the only course available. But to continue this reverence for the external after the dawn of internal light, to retain the adoration for the shadow after the substance had been given, to seek for a temporal Messiah when the spiritual kingdom had already come,—this was in the highest degree unnatural and wrong; and the Church acted rightly and wisely in assigning to those who lagged behind an aim and a position which marked inferiority.

In proportion as Judaic Christianity declined, there rose more and more into prominence that party whom we have called Coalitionists, and whom we have represented as forming the nucleus of the future Church of Alexandria. This party undoubtedly received an additional weight and influence from the favour with which their mild and conciliatory policy was regarded by one of the noblest sons of Christianity—we mean that apostle who has obtained the enviable distinction of being called the beloved disciple. The life of John is far more obscure to us than that either of Peter or of Paul, and we gather the facts of his mental development rather from indirect suggestions than from definite statements. All we know of him is derived from the Christian writings themselves, and therefore to these alone we can appeal. Strange to say, his early life gave little promise of the mellow fruit it bore. The man whose name has been singled out from all the

Christians as the peculiar representative of love, began his career by a spirit of high intolerance, and an intolerance the more inexcusable, because it was manifested towards a branch of his own countrymen. He was amongst the foremost of those who in the most material sense waited for the consolation of Israel, and his first coming to the Master seems to have been prompted by a motive not altogether unselfish. He appears at a later date to have attached himself to the conservative party, and he was recognised along with Peter and James as one of the pillars in the Church of Jerusalem. When next we meet with him, it is after long years and many changes; and the greatest of all the changes is that which has been accomplished in himself. The Jew has become a cosmopolitan, the aspirant to external power has deepened into a mind of the purest spirituality, and the man who would have called down fire upon the Samaritan village is willing to appropriate the stores even of heathen culture. At what time the transformation was accomplished we know not; probably he did not himself know, for it would be highly unnatural to suppose that a development involving such mental expansion could have been concentrated in a time so brief as to leave a definite impress. Nor are we aware what were those precise influences under which the beloved disciple attained to such spiritual power. His long residence at Ephesus doubtless contributed somewhat to this end; but we think his long life contributed still more. It was his peculiar privilege to survive the Jewish economy, and to see the barrenness of



those expectations which had tempted his country from the search for higher things. Accordingly, his mind was driven ever more and more inward upon itself, and taught ever increasingly to seek for its highest good in the deepening of its own spiritual nature. If hitherto men had looked chiefly at what Christianity had done *for* them, John meditated intensely on what Christianity had done *in* them, and sought amidst the disciples of the Master for the evidence that His own life was present within their souls; this he regarded as the goal of Christianity. In his old age he wrote a gospel embodying this aspect of Christian truth,—a gospel so profound in its spirituality, and so intense in its pathos, that it has become pre-eminently the most precious relic of early Christian literature. We believe that before this gospel was given forth to the world, its author had passed away; but there is evidence in the concluding chapter that the hand of a disciple had paid a last tribute of love by editing the work of his master. And if that disciple was, as has been frequently supposed, a Jew of Alexandria, it must have lent a fresh influence to the rising Alexandrian school to have borne the reputation of having honoured one so great. For, indeed, it is undeniable that from this time the Church of Alexandria began to take its place as the dominant power in the influencing of Christian thought, and that the party of coalitionists which this Church represented took precedence over all other factions. Towards the close of the century, the Pauline school itself showed symptoms of decline. The battle for liberty had been fought and won, and

with the winning of that battle there had passed away all necessity for the existence of such a party. Accordingly, as time wore on, the Pauline school lost its polemical character, as it was only right and fitting that it should do. Unfortunately, however, with its polemical character, it lost something which was of far greater importance, and something which should have continued unaffected by peace or war—we mean that very spirit of liberty which it had been its glory to achieve. Indeed, before we have well passed the threshold of another century, we are made powerfully conscious of the fact that there has been a complete transmutation of parties; the conservatives have become liberals, and the liberals have become conservatives,—the East expands into the school of Alexandria, and the West contracts into the nucleus of hierarchical Rome. Henceforth it is to the former we must look for progress, to the latter for the arrest of progress; to the East for freedom, to the West for the restraints of law. In one aspect, it is painful to think that the newly acquired unity of the Christian Church should thus almost immediately have been broken again into factions; but the painfulness of the spectacle lies on the surface—it is one of those wounds which are inflicted to produce health and soundness. All history proves that truth can only flourish through opposition, and that neither of the opposing sides can usually claim its entire possession. All history proves that a truth held to the exclusion of other truths virtually ceases to be true, and loses by excess that power which it exerted in its legitimate limits; and therefore it is really one of

the bright features of human history, that no opinion has at any time been suffered to exercise an absolute sway, and that every party has been kept in check by the counteracting influence of opposing views.

But to return from this digression. The death of John contributed much to hasten the death of Christian Judaism. The child-life of Christianity had already left the home of its nativity, and that home itself had passed into the hands of strangers. Its influence, however, could not wholly die as long as oral tradition remained—as long as there were men living whose youth had been spent on Jewish soil, and who had received on that soil a personal vision of the Master. John was one of the last of these; and although himself at the farthest remove from Judaic Christianity, his very life helped to keep it torpidly alive. With the close of that life, its last charm was broken. It is doubtful if there remained another link in that chain which had connected the new generation with the old, and in any case the most precious link was gone. Henceforth the testimony of direct witnesses must be exchanged for the testimony of those who had been instructed by others, and the influence of the Christian writings must gradually supersede the authority of verbal communication. The child-life of Christianity, deprived not only of home, but of the memories of home, must look within its own depths for another source of strength, and endeavour by independent effort to regain that position which it had inherited from birth.

## CHAPTER IX.

### INDEPENDENT SPECULATIONS OF THE CHILD-LIFE.

WE have now traced the history of Christianity up to that period when, although still in its days of childhood, it had been bereft of all outward support. It had been driven from the home of its nativity, and gradually weaned even from the associations of home, and therefore it had been deprived of those advantages which are in general granted to the life of the individual child. We have seen that already the youthful heart of Christianity had been indulging in speculative visions, those hopes of Messianic glory which had been bequeathed to it by its ancestors. But the very fact that these hopes *were* bequeathed deprived them of the nature of independent speculations; they were not the product of the Christian consciousness, but were merely inherited by Christianity as an heirloom of the past. That past had now been severed from the life of Christianity, and the effect of this severance could not at first be beneficial. Its immediate consequence was a seizure of mental paralysis. There is not in the annals of Christian history a period more dreary and more uninteresting than that which intervenes between the taking of Jerusalem and the close of the century.

That times of great excitement are followed by times of much depression is a law of human nature, but it is seldom that the transition is so marked as was that which indicated the boundary between the age of the apostles and the age of their immediate followers. The fall is greater than one would have naturally expected, and we are made painfully conscious that the course of Christian life has been arrested by one of those seasons of weakness, which are to the mind what diseases are to the body. If we know little of this period, it is probably because there is little to tell, and therefore the scantiness of its historical records is perhaps less to be regretted than is usually supposed.

But if excitement produces languor, languor is apt to react again into excitement, for polarity is the law of life, and each extreme tends to its opposite. The persecution of Domitian seems to have revived the ebbing life of the Church, and given a fresh stimulus to Christian effort. It was soon evident, indeed, that the life had taken a new direction—had exchanged the time of action for a season of contemplation. Christianity was standing on the borders of a region which as yet had been foreign to it—the region of thought and speculation. For the first time it began to inquire into the meaning of those mysteries which surrounded it; mysteries which hitherto it had been content to feel, but which now it essayed to explain. It will not surprise us if, in its earliest efforts, it exhibited much rashness and more failure, but we will not be disposed to stamp these efforts with the name of heresy. We ought to consider at this stage not so much what the Church said, as what it wanted to say. Its feelings



were strong, its intellectual power as yet weak. It is at all times difficult to give adequate expression to intense feeling, peculiarly difficult to express it in intellectual form ; and the arduousness of the task is rendered doubly apparent when it is seen in an early stage of being. How many are the logical absurdities which fall from the lips of the child in struggling to give utterance to something which in itself is true and noble ; and should we not extend to the childhood of a religion that forbearance which we grant to the childhood of an individual man ? If we were forced to give a name to the earliest Christian speculations, we would call them prospective heresies ; doctrines which, in the course of later development, must be seen to be imperfect expressions of Christian thought, but which at the present stage of the religious life are neither unnatural nor pernicious. We cannot consent to view them as altogether outside phenomena, we cannot be induced to regard them as essentially alien to the spirit of Christianity ; we must be allowed to look upon them as parts of one generic whole, phases of one progressive life, whose value lies in the preparation which they make for higher things.

The early speculations of Christianity have been comprehended under one common name—Gnosticism. This shows clearly that the points in which they are agreed are more important than the points in which they differ—in other words, that there is one spirit pervading them all. It is this spirit of Gnosticism with which alone we have to do. We are not writing a history of doctrines, and therefore we are not called to enumerate, much less to describe, the different

Gnostic systems. The consideration of this subject belongs to a totally different department, and would lead us altogether out of our province. We are not concerned with the distinctive views of Cerinthus, or Basilides, or Valentinus, or Marcion, but with that general idea which pervaded the views of all alike, and constituted the very spirit of Gnosticism. We have to consider what relation this phase of Christian thought presented to the general life of Christianity, what stage it occupied in the development of the religious consciousness, and in what manner it subserved the end of contributing to after stages.

Gnosticism is commonly held to have been a system, or series of systems, constructed in opposition to Judaism; but in truth we cannot, without qualification, subscribe to such a view. What Gnosticism did oppose was neither Judaism nor Gentilism, but empiricism, whether Jewish or Gentile. It was directed against the devotion to the external, in whatever form that devotion might manifest itself. If it came in the form of a hierarchy, the Gnostic proposed a universal priesthood—a priesthood in which every man might share who possessed that spiritual sense by which he could commune with God. If it came under the aspect of reverence for the letter, the Gnostic pointed to an inward meaning of the divine word, which could not be grasped by the superficial mind. If it came in the guise of regret for departed national glory, the Gnostic fearlessly declared that the Christian world of his own day was grander in its inward depths than was the Jewish world of the past

in its outward splendours. Or if, as with the Gentile nations, it came in the garb of sensuous pleasure, the Gnostic, with an exaggeration which was, indeed, erroneous in doctrine but not the less honourable in design, declared the senses to be the source of all evil, and the crucifixion of sense to be the duty of every man. Gnosticism was thus no respecter of persons. Wheresoever it found the evidence of devotion to the outward life, whether in the breast of Jew or Gentile, barbarian or Scythian, bond or free, there it recognised an antagonist, and thither it directed its assaults. But for the very same reason Gnosticism was essentially an eclectic system; rejecting the external in all schools, it was willing to embrace that which was internal in all.

Its chief seat was Alexandria, and we have seen that the tendency of Alexandrian thought was ever towards coalition. Gnosticism shared in the nature of that soil which gave it birth. It aspired to be a plant which could flourish in all climates, and adapt itself to the peculiarities of every land. Its leading aim was to unite itself with surrounding things, or rather to gather surrounding things under its own shadow. In the most distorted forms of faith it found a true spirit, and it called upon these to yield up that spirit. In point of fact, there never was a phase of religious life which succeeded in appropriating to itself so many different forms of being. Jewish Ebionism approached it with admiration, and ultimately lost its very name in the name of that which it admired. Orientalism drew near to it with avidity, and seemed to renew its youth in the breathing of its atmosphere. Hellenism

succumbed to its strength, and lent it the beauty of Grecian culture. Platonic philosophy sought through its aid, and not altogether without success, to amalgamate with the doctrines of Christianity. And even Parsism, that religion which we have seen to have been the child of unrest, endeavoured here to close the long struggle between the principle of good and the principle of evil. Almost, it seems to us, as if here we had seen foreshadowed the fulfilment of that prophecy which reveals the birds of the air coming to lodge on the branches of the gospel tree; for here the restless thoughts of the human soul, which have been long flying without repose, appear for a moment to find a spot where they can cease from their wanderings. Gnosticism is the fruit of that universal spirit which is peculiar to the religion of Christ; the premature, the unripe fruit, the fruit at its very worst, but still the harbinger of a summer ripeness which is yet to come, and whose coming it is privileged to predict.

What, then, is essentially the spirit of this Gnosticism, which exercised so powerful an influence over the first half of the second century? Its nature may be summed up in a single phrase—the pursuit of the ideal; and in this the life of Christianity presents a striking resemblance to the life of the individual soul. It is at a very early age indeed that the child begins to revolt from reality; finds itself unsatisfied with the things around it, and seeks to live in a new world. It is true that this revolt of the child from reality does not involve a recoil from material images; the child-life is naturally sensuous, and it cannot be



untrue to its own nature. In flying from the actual world, it does not directly find a spiritual one; it rather enshrines itself in fairyland, where all the old forms remain, but exist in new and fantastic combinations. Its transition is thus only from one world of sense into another, yet all the time it is seeking something more than the sensuous. There is a hidden spirit within these forms in which it revels, an eternal truth enveloped in the temporal shapes which pass before it. And here it presents a beautiful analogy to that period when the child-life of the Christian Church began to emerge from feeling into thought. Its capacities were as yet confined to the limits of sense, but its desires had already transcended these limits. It was weary of prosaic reality; weary of the mere worship of the letter; weary of the reverence for forms and ceremonies; weary, above all, of the pride of historical descent, which had proved successively the bane of hierarchical Judaism and Judaic Christianity. It wanted to soar away from these external things; to get into a purer atmosphere; to become recipient of a higher life. And yet the metaphor is not altogether philosophically true. It wanted not so much to soar above them, as to plunge beneath them. It was quite content that outward things should remain, if only they would be satisfied to remain as a superstructure. It had no objection to the letter of Scripture, or to the observance of forms and ceremonies, provided only that the letter and the forms and the ceremonies would agree to occupy the place of envelopes for thought. To the opening mind of the Church, the grandest



aspect of all truth was its spiritual aspect ; and where-soever it could obtain a glimpse of this, it was willing to honour and perpetuate the medium of its transmission. But the Church had been made painfully aware that outward forms had been diverted from their natural use ; that they had ceased to be the embodiments of spiritual life, and were even aspiring to be the barriers to the transmission of that life. Therefore the Church of that age was at war with outward forms, at variance with the external world in general, and disposed even to depreciate the researches of the past. It sought for something deeper than the visible ; the changeless in the mutable ; the spiritual element underlying the things of time.

But while the desires of the young Church pointed to the ideal, its capacities, as we have said, were limited to the sensuous. It was not able to say what it wanted to say ; the spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak. Its highest sentiments took a grotesque form, because they were forced to assume a material shape. Its profoundest speculations wore the aspect of fairy tales, because they were compelled to be clothed in the vestures of perishable things. There is no charge so frequently preferred against the doctrines of Gnosticism as that of absolute absurdity ; even the idea of heresy is wont to disappear in the sense of the ridiculous. But, in truth, to those who look beneath the surface, whatever there may be to fear in Gnosticism, there is very little to laugh at. It is soon apparent to calm reflection, that in studying the Gnostic teachers we are standing in the presence

of men whom chronology alone prevents from being the most subtle thinkers of any age—men whose desires are spiritually deep, and whose thought is only crude because, in accordance with its stage of childhood, it is enveloped in a sensuous form. And if, without inquiring into their hidden meanings, we take even the most superficial aspect of their system, we shall find that the greatest fault which can be laid to their charge is that of badly expressing themselves. When they tell us that high above all heavens there is a region called the Pleroma, or fulness of light, and that out of this region God can only speak through the medium of celestial messengers, what is that but a very imperfect paraphrase of the beautiful Pauline utterance, which describes the Divine Being as ‘dwelling in a light which is inaccessible and full of glory’? They want to express the thought that the Infinite Fulness must limit Himself in order to reveal Himself. When they tell us, with Basilides, that the number of heavenly messengers is three hundred and sixty-five, do they not design to depict the course of the world through time as a sacred year, with its seed-time and its harvest, its spring and its summer, its nights and its days? When they tell us that the God of the Old Testament was an inferior being, whom the absolute God had appointed to be His vicegerent upon earth, they use, it must be confessed, very unfortunate language. But, divested of its imagery, does it amount to anything more than this, that the Jewish economy was only a provisional government—not itself the light, but the schoolmaster who conducted to the light? When, with greater

boldness still, they declare that the vicegerent came into collision with the absolute Ruler, and endeavoured to retard the course of His manifestations, are they not groping after the expression of the great truth, that an obedience which is dictated by mere outward law is incompatible with that obedience which is yielded to the power of love? Or, to name no other instance, when one of their sects expresses a profound reverence for that serpent which tempted to the first sin, do we not see, in very fantastic form, the emergence of a thought which has been fruitful in Christian literature,—the idea that virtue is higher than innocence, and that the perfection which has conquered through suffering is a nobler goal than the perfection which endures because it has never felt the storm?

There was, however, one great defect in Gnosticism, —a defect which grew out of its very spirituality, and which tended in great measure to mar the Christology of the second century. The opposition of Gnosticism to the sphere of the external led it to disparage humanity itself. Matter was the source of sin; and the nature of a human being was always associated with material conditions. There must, therefore, be a radical antagonism between the human and the divine. From this doctrine there immediately followed a startling conclusion—startling, but irresistibly logical. If humanity itself be an evil thing, the Founder of Christianity could not have been a man. To call Him human would be to call Him sinful. The Gnostic saw the inference, and did not shrink from it; his love for the Master led him to deny His

humanity. He looked upon the earthly life of Christ as an illusion. His sufferings were only apparent sufferings; His body only the appearance of a body; His death only the semblance of a death. There were some, indeed, who admitted the human personality of Jesus, but denied that of the Christ who was in union with Him. Their idea seems to have been that of a purely divine spirit alighting at baptism upon a human soul, dwelling within it for a few years in the midst of its sufferings, while yet not partaker of these sufferings, and at last, as the crucifixion hour approached, flying back to its native heaven, and leaving the unaided humanity to die alone. In each of these views there is one common thought, that of a Christ who was not man. And in this thought Christianity at last reveals itself at the very opposite pole from Judaism. It would be hard to say which of the two extremes is more revolting to the Christian consciousness. In the worship of the Jewish temple we see the adoration of a Christ who, at best, is of the earth earthy; a temporal king who rules with an outward sceptre; a soldier who fights with carnal weapons; a conqueror who subjugates by physical power. In the worship of Gnosticism we see the adoration of a Christ who is indeed of the heaven heavenly, but so heavenly that all humanity is crushed out of Him; a Being at whose power we may marvel, and at whose command we may bow submissively, but who can never be to us a revelation of God, because He is not to us a revelation of man. We say that between these views it would be difficult to make a choice; each of them abstracts one hemisphere from the



spiritual world, and presents a one-sided aspect of the ideal of Christian worship. Yet there can be no question that, granting their influences to be equally pernicious, that of Gnosticism has been far more difficult to eradicate. We have said that the Christ of Gnosticism became, to a great extent, the Christ of the second century; and the most superficial acquaintance with that century must convince us that it was so. The fact that Praxeas could promulgate analogous views in the very heart of Rome itself, and could promulgate these views not only without condemnation, but seemingly without disapproval, is alone a powerful proof how much the spirit of that age had been infected with this tendency. But, indeed, are we not entitled to go much farther? Is not this precisely that trace of Gnosticism which lingers in the theology of mediæval times, and which appears still in the Romanism of to-day? What is the reason that the mediæval Church was induced to interpose the mediation of angels between the human soul and the object of supreme worship? The Church of the Middle Ages had no choice but to do so. It had received by inheritance the idea of a Christ whose nature leant more to the divine than to the human hemisphere; a Christ who was still unapproachable by reason of His glory, and to whom humanity could only draw near through the intervention and intercession of less exalted powers. Therefore it was that the mind of Papal Christendom was impelled, by the very necessity of its nature, to people the regions of space with intelligences, lofty yet finite; to lavish the treasures of its worship upon objects inferior to the



highest. Its Christ was reserved for that day when the lives of men would be summed up in judgment; its hopes for the present hour rested in the ministry of angels.

Such was the baleful influence which the Christology of Gnosticism long exercised, and to some extent still continues to exercise, upon the Christian Church. And yet, when allowance has been made for this, it would be unjust to deny that in some important respects the effects of Gnosticism were rather beneficial than injurious. For one thing, it showed to the world of that day, and shows still to the world of our day, how wondrous must have been that impression produced by the earthly life of the Founder of Christianity; an impression so great, that the temptation to speculative error lay rather in the denial of His humanity than in the doubt of His divinity. In the paucity and meagreness of the records of this period, in the absence of any definite narrative which could guide us to the sentiments with which the age succeeding the apostles regarded Jesus, it is surely something that we are able to point to a very early theological system,—a system full, indeed, of errors and extravagances, but which through all its errors and through all its extravagances held up the portrait of the Master as the image of one divine; for this we must confess, that we owe to these speculations a debt of gratitude. But the most beneficial part of the influence of Gnosticism lay rather in its intellectual than in its theological aspect. It was the first independent effort of the child-life to find a reason for the hope that was in it, and therefore it marked the

beginning of the history of the Christian intellect. It started the mind of the Church upon a speculative career, which never paused, not even in the days of its deepest darkness, not even in the seasons of its utmost worldliness. The intellectual life which Christianity received from Gnosticism was never extinguished through all the ages; fainting often, sinking often, seemingly dying often, it ever and anon blazed forth with redoubled splendour, and regained more than all the influence it had lost. No one who contemplates the manifestations of this life in the second century can wonder that it has proved so fruitful and so enduring. We have scarcely passed the threshold of that century till we are made aware that we are in the midst of a great renaissance—a renaissance in which the old world strives to blend with the new, and heathenism struggles to find a niche in the Christian temple. We shall not be surprised although the earliest manifestations of this spirit seem to hover between light and darkness. We shall not be surprised although the dawn of the Christian intellect may at times be hardly distinguishable from the shades of heathen thought. In point of fact, the history of this renaissance is the history of a mental progress from daybreak to noonday—the record of the course of a great light, from its birth amid the night-clouds, to its full expansion of meridian glory. In the beautiful epistle to Diognetus, which dates from the beginning of the century, we see as yet rather the prophecy than the advent of the intellectual life; we are here still on the border-land between the age of Ignatius and the age of Neo-Platonism,

and the empire of intuition is still predominant over the reign of speculative thought. With Justin Martyr, we have already bounded over the line, and have entered into a region where speculation wields the sceptre, and intuition sinks into the background. We feel instinctively that we are approaching a world of new ideas—ideas more potent, more fruitful, more attractive, and, it must be confessed, more dangerous. That which is powerful for good would be powerful for evil if misdirected; and just because speculation has a loftier flight than feeling, it is proportionally exposed to greater danger. And the farther we advance, the danger of the renaissance seems to deepen; the traditions of the past become more dim, and thought increases in its independent boldness. Through the Platonism of Justin the light still shines clearly, but immediately afterwards it threatens to disappear. With Athenagoras and Theophilus it flickers, with Tatian it almost goes out, and the shades of the past seem to overwhelm the present dawn. But immediately the light reasserts itself. In the system of the Alexandrian Clement, the elements of the old and the new continue to struggle on; but it is soon manifest that the victory inclines to the day-break. The portrait of the Master, which as yet had been made to reflect only the glories of creation, is now beheld irradiating the inner light of the Infinite Father Himself. And when, half a century later, the spirit of the renaissance is taken up by the great Origen, the result of the conflict between the heathen and the Christian world is no longer doubtful; if the elements of the former remain,

they remain in a state of solution, and will ere long be absorbed in the light of the rising sun. By this time, indeed, the collective Church has lost the first freshness of the speculative spirit, and the shades of the prison-house are gradually closing over its early dreams. But Origen, and such men as Origen, exist as representatives of the past, and concentrate in their own lives the life of theological speculation. At last, with Augustine, the victory is complete; the ideas of the Christian intellect have been moulded into one massive system, over which shines a noon-day sun of vital warmth, which dissipates every incongruous element, and attracts within its own radius all that is capable of union with the Christian life.

We see, then, that Gnosticism was the beginning, and in some sense the cause, of a great literary renaissance, through which the religion of Christ was able to claim its position as a science of theology. Nor are we disposed to deny that, in addition to this direct influence, Gnosticism may have exerted an indirect one over spheres naturally foreign to its own. We have spoken of the shades of the prison-house which gradually enveloped the life of Christianity, and it must indeed be confessed that the period of poetic fervour was succeeded by a period of very prosaic work. But, just as in individual life the times which are allotted to work receive a fresh interest and stimulus, because they have been preceded by times allotted to contemplation, so in the life of the Christian Church we have every reason to believe that the period of activity was helped by the season

of thought which went before it. The formation of a high ideal is a powerful impetus to action, and the very fact that Christianity had spent so much time in the secret of the pavilion must have rendered it far easier to perform the services of the outer tabernacle; its lofty sense of the divine must have quickened its interest in the human. And who shall say that even the worldliness of the coming age was not softened, or at least retarded, by the result of previous culture? At no period of its history, however dark, did the Church wholly forget its speculative freedom; at no season, however unhealthy, was there not occasionally wafted a breeze of other days. And when in the fulness of time the material spell once more was broken, when the Church of mediæval Europe woke up into the consciousness of a life deeper than sense, and an ideal higher than the world, the new renaissance was felt to be only a revival of the old, and the Christianity of the Reformation found the charter of its freedom in the days of its opening intellectual life.



## CHAPTER X.

### INFLUENCE OF WORLDLY CONTACT.

THERE is in the history of every being an outer and an inner life, which, while they are distinguishable in thought, are inseparable in fact, for they act and react upon one another. During all that period in which Christianity was engaged in striving to realize its own inward wealth, it was beset by influences from without which naturally tended to retard its spiritual development. Those worldly influences were treated at first with contempt, afterwards with indifference, and ultimately with favour. Their power was almost unobserved in the first freshness of that spiritual fervour with which the young Church threw itself into the vortex of speculation ; but when the first fervour had subsided, it was found that by stages, slow yet sure, the world had been making way. The moment we have entered within the threshold of the second century, we are conscious of a change in the attitude of the world towards the Church,—a change which indicates clearly a mitigation of their mutual antagonism. Since the days of Nero the profession of the Christian religion had been a capital crime, and the first century had closed with that persecution of Domitian, in

which, according to general belief, the apostle John suffered exile. But with the reign of Trajan, we see already the foreshadowing of a milder policy; for in his letter to the governor of Bithynia, he expresses his desire that the Christians should not be sought for. His successor Adrian is still more favourable; he commands that the Christians shall not be punished unless they have done anything contrary to the law, and thereby he deserts the very principle of the Neronian edict. The mild and benignant Antoninus Pius seems to have carried this tendency into positive toleration. If we can believe in the genuineness of his rescript, he threatened the informers against Christianity with the punishment of death. Be this as it may, it is unquestionable that during his reign the religion endured little oppression. Now to what do these facts amount? Simply this, that during the first sixty years of the second century the religion of Christ enjoyed upon the whole a period of unwonted repose. It is a significant fact, that the most formidable attack made upon Christianity during this length of years was aimed, not with carnal, but with intellectual weapons. When the heathen world, in the person of the Epicurean Celsus, condescended to enter the lists with Christianity on the ground of rational argument, it was already apparent that in the estimation of that heathen world Christianity bulked higher. Men seek to subjugate inferiors by force, but in general they only argue with those whom they consider intellectual equals. And truly the Christianity of this period had deserved the respect of heathendom, for its attitude toward the

old world had been at once firm and conciliatory. It had always proclaimed itself as destined to eclipse all existing systems, but at the same time it had aspired to eclipse them not by overshadowing them in darkness, but by merging them in its own divine light. It had not been afraid to gather from these systems of the ancient world whatever in them was true, or beautiful, or good; nay, it had been willing even to adopt some things in them which were neither good nor evil, in the hope that thereby it might retain that association with the past which endears everything to the human soul. And as the heathen world beheld this, there rose within it a mingled respect and fear; it felt that at last there had risen a power which could no longer be suppressed by mere physical might, but which must henceforth be encountered with its own weapons, the weapons of intellectual force and spiritual discernment.

Here, then, was probably the origin, or at least one of the origins, of that increase of outward repose which Christianity was now permitted to enjoy. It was highly natural that, in proportion as the heathen world recognised its own affinities to the new religion, it should exchange its policy of outward aggression for a policy of intellectual disputation, in which the combatants might find some common ground. But if this cessation of external persecution was natural, are we prepared to affirm that it was also beneficial? That it contributed to the advance of Christian speculation cannot be denied; that it afforded time for the scientific development of thought is readily

apparent; that it enabled the mind of the Church to direct its attention to those treasures of literature which tend to incorporate truth with beauty, is evident on the very surface of the history. But while it is conceded that in this, as in most other cases, the freedom from persecution was favourable to the Christian intellect, it is by no means equally clear that it was conducive to Christian morals. On the contrary, it must be admitted that, in proportion as this century advances, the fervour of its religious life declines. The exclusive devotion to intellectual pursuits in the East, and the growing familiarity with the Roman world in the West, were alike calculated to dim in the youthful heart of Christianity those impressions of early love and joy which had enabled the disciples of a former age to endure the cross and despise the shame.

We have already said, that towards the close of the previous century the Pauline school began to lose its Pauline character, and this declension became more evident with the advance of time. That Pauline church which had been planted in Rome was placed in a very dangerous vicinity. It was growing up in the soil of one of the most despotic empires this world has ever seen—an empire whose highest ideal was the possession of external power, and whose noblest conception of conquest was the crushing influence of such power. As long as this Roman empire stood in outward antagonism to Christianity, its ideal of an outward greatness purchased by despotic authority must have been in the highest degree repulsive to the Christian Church. But as

the empire subsided in its bitterness to the new religion, as the heathen world began to contemplate Christianity with a more respectful if not a more friendly gaze, and as Christianity itself began to discover in the heathen world some gropings after the true, the good, and the beautiful, the ideal of imperial Rome must have lost much of its repellent aspect. The truth is, the Mistress of the World was far more formidable to the Church in her friendship than in her enmity: her enmity, in the very act of crushing the body, brought out the graces of the spirit; but her friendship dwarfed the life of the spirit by pampering the wants of the body. As yet, indeed, Christianity was far from having secured the friendship of pagan Rome; but even Roman toleration was dangerous, and the danger soon appeared. The Church began with steadfast eye to contemplate that spectacle of outward dominion from which a few years ago it had revolted with disgust, and between earnest contemplation and fervent admiration there often intervenes a very small step. By slow and imperceptible stages, imperceptible perhaps even to itself, there entered into the heart of Christianity the pagan ideal of greatness, and there rose up within the mind of the youthful Church a new and terrible dream,—new to the spirit of Pauline Christendom, terrible in its results to future ages. Why should not this grand Roman empire be mirrored in the Church of Christ? Why should not Christianity exalt itself into an outward kingdom, presided over by a visible head, and exerting absolute dominion over all ends of the earth? Such was the



question which suggested itself to the opening life of Christianity, and it cannot be denied that there were plausible grounds for such a question. Christianity was indeed commissioned to rule the world; this was its destiny, and it did not mistake its destiny. What it did mistake was the legitimate road to the goal. It is natural that a physical power should rule by a visible head and sceptre; it is natural that an earthly kingdom should conquer by earthly weapons; but that a spiritual power should establish its authority by the influence of material force is not only unnatural, but a contradiction in terms; in the very act of doing so it would cease to be spiritual. This was precisely what Christianity did not see; it was sent to rule the world, it was sent to wield authority, but the rule and the authority must be after its own kind. It was quite possible that a time might come when the followers of Christ would become so numerous as to dominate by physical might, yet such an empire would in no sense differ from any secular dominion; it would not be essentially Christian. The distinctive character of Christian authority was to be its inwardness, its power to influence the actions through the mind and heart; and when the Church began to dream of a hierarchy, it began to be untrue to its own mission. Such, unfortunately, was its attitude at this period. Looking admiringly upon the wondrous mechanism of the Roman polity, it asked itself if anything in its own past history could find a meeting-place with such imperial splendour, and it found it in those days of Jewish legalism, which Paul had spent his life in striving to banish. It is melan-

choly to see the church of the Gentile apostle thus forgetting its first love, and seeking to return to that bondage from which the truth had made it free; yet such was undoubtedly the effect which the toleration extended by the Roman empire produced upon the Christianity of the second century. It exerted over it a retrogressive influence, and to that influence it yielded; it cast back its eye with a lingering look of regret upon that stage of its being which it had surmounted, and began to weave visions of a new Judea after the pattern of imperial Rome.

Yet let it not be thought that the Christian Church abandoned itself to this suggestion without a blush of shame; on the contrary, it was deeply conscious of its own inconsistency. It was about this time that there appeared a very remarkable work, bearing the name of *The Recognitions*. It is the earliest novel in Christian literature. It is written as if it were the work of Clement of Rome, without, however, as we think, really designing to be thought so. It does not appear to us to claim any other position than that of a historical romance, yet it is a romance which is dictated by the spirit of the age, and designed as a defence of that spirit. Its aim is to show, in the form of a connected narrative, how Gentile and Jewish thought are not, after all, incapable of reconciliation. As the representative of Gentile ideas it selects the Roman Clement, the disciple of Paul; as the representative of Judaic Christianity it takes the apostle Peter, the head of the Conservative party, and it strives to bring these heroes of its story into such companionship with one another as shall elicit their mutual esteem. Whether

the author of this book were by birth a Jew or a Gentile is a matter which has not been settled, nor is it of much consequence to settle it. He evidently aims not so much to reflect his own sentiments, as to reflect and to defend the tendency of his age; and this he does with much ability, and in the true spirit of the renaissance. But the significant fact is, that the age should have felt the need of such a defence, and should have so greedily accepted it when offered. This book, along with that later edition of it called the *Clementine Homilies*, obtained a vast celebrity and a wide-spread popularity, and the reason is plain. The Church was really ashamed of itself—ashamed of its backsliding, ashamed of its fall from its high Pauline ideal. The consciousness of its retrogressive tendency made it uncomfortable; it looked about for an excuse, an apology, a defence of its conduct, and it seemed to find it here. And the very fact that it sought such an excuse showed that its life was not wholly dead, that the memories of its past glory had not entirely faded, and that it must yet sink lower ere it could be prevailed upon thoroughly to surrender itself to the power of a worldly influence and the empire of a secular ambition.

We shall have occasion in our next chapter to consider that moral struggle which Christianity had to undergo before it could be induced to relinquish its spiritual birthright. In the meantime, let us observe that this dawning of its worldly tendency was just as unfavourable to its intellectual as to its moral life. The mind which has become absorbed in outward things soon acquires a distaste to speculation, and the

principle was pre-eminently verified in the Christianity of this age. In proportion as the dream of a hierarchy deepened, the speculations of the reason declined. The nearer Christianity approached to the ideal of a material splendour, the farther it receded from its ideal of intellectual power. Those subjects of investigation which were once the sources of its purest joy, became in the course of time the objects of its deepest suspicion. Philosophy, independent research, critical analysis, the very desire to penetrate into surrounding mysteries, became odious to the heart of a Church whose affections were becoming more and more centred on the things beneath. Nor can we say that, in proscribing these things, the Church was inconsistent with its materializing tendency. The tendency itself was deplorable, but when it had once arisen, Christianity could only work it out by carrying it to its logical consequences. The consequence of all despotism is mental poverty. An empire in which the one rules absolutely over the many, can only continue to exist by restraining the many from the natural exercise of thought. A period of generally diffused enlightenment is incompatible with a reign of despotic terror, and every power which has sought to dominate by physical force alone has been compelled to begin its work by closing the gates of inquiry, and sealing the fountains of thought.

It will be found throughout the course of history that the religious spirit of every age has in general tended to incarnate itself in one or two individuals; commonly in one pre-eminently. Each century of Christian history has had its representative man, the



man in whom its various tendencies are concentrated into one life, and exhibited to the world in unity. The second century produced such a man. As it approached its close, its spirit found an incarnation, and in the course of a single life it weighed itself in the balance and summed up its good and evil. The representative whom it created was Irenæus, Bishop of Lyons, the first prominent figure that meets the eye of the historian since the days of the evangelist John. With that evangelist, indeed, he was peculiarly associated, for he was a pupil of that Polycarp who was himself the apostle's immediate disciple. To be bound so closely to the memories of the golden past; to be linked so intimately with those days of wonder and of beauty which were so soon to be fading in the far distance; to be a living monument of the reality of that Christian narrative which forms the framework of the Master's portrait, was indeed a position of lofty eminence. Irenæus stood, as it were, between two worlds—the world of direct observation, and the world of historic testimony. He had himself in extreme youth looked upon the seer of Patmos, and he tells us that his impressions of that time were far more vivid than his remembrances of later things. It cannot surprise us that a man so highly privileged should have been regarded by the Christians of his own age with a respect which bordered on veneration; yet it must be acknowledged that the very glory of Irenæus was the source of his weakness. He had himself received the truths of Christianity by a tradition so direct that it amounted almost to personal perception of the facts, and therefore it was, perhaps,



not unnatural that he should attach great importance to tradition ; but it was highly unnatural in a man of such calm and rational judgment to set up his own privilege as a standard of ecclesiastical law. Tradition was to him a more direct source of evidence than the reasonings of the human mind, but that was only because part of his life had run parallel with Christianity's early morning. It was narrow in the extreme to assume that tradition could be to others what it was to him ; still more narrow to set himself in antagonism to that exercise of natural reason which was the only source of evidence to those who had not seen and yet believed. Yet this was precisely the position which Irenæus took ; the brightness of his past inspired him with a reverence for antiquity, and the reverence for antiquity blinded him to the claims of future progress. Christianity had, in his view, reached its utmost limit of perfection when it was able to ground its doctrines upon the authority of a visible Church, whose overseers had received a divine commission ; and anything which diverted the mind from this authority was regarded by him as worthy of reprobation. The outward Church was the sole repository of revealed truth, and out of that Church all was darkness,—it must have no rival and no second, it must stand alone in its solitary majesty. Thought must be silent before it, reason must bow down and worship it, the natural instincts of the human soul must yield themselves captive to its influence, and man must distrust the dictates of every mental power which did not dictate harmoniously with its decisions and commands.

Such was the voice of Irenæus, and the voice of Irenæus was the utterance of the age. He was the mouthpiece of his century, the representative of his era, the man created to reveal the hour. It would be wrong, however, to conclude that either Irenæus or his age had fully acknowledged the ideal of worldly greatness; in truth it was not so. Irenæus, in accordance with the spirit of his time, had turned his eye backward to contemplate the vision of material splendour; in accordance with the spirit of his time, he had set his heart upon a standard of infallible outward authority; and in accordance with the spirit of his time, he was beginning to revolt from those inward sources of evidence which might render authority needless; but there Irenæus and the spirit of his time alike stood still. The second Christian century was not prepared to go the whole length in the establishment of a world-ideal. It wavered even in assigning an absolute pre-eminence to a bishop over a presbyter; it wavered not at all in denying the superior authority of the Roman episcopate to that of other bishops. It had a respect for outward unity, and it had no objection to see that unity represented in a visible head, but as yet it would recognise only the headship of a president, not the headship of a king. Deeply alive to the importance of large cities as centres of Christian life, it naturally looked to Rome as a powerful source of influence, and saw in the Bishop of Rome a man whose high position made him worthy of respect; but the respect was paid to the position, and not to the authority. That same Irenæus, who was so eager

to establish a church of outward unity, was of all men most vehement in rejecting the superior claims of a Roman bishop ; and when Victor, who held that see, attempted to settle the Easter controversy by an edict of excommunication, Irenæus was the man who in the name of the Christian Church denied his right to do so. The world was gaining, but it had still much to gain. The ideal of an outward ambition was looming larger and drawing nearer ; but ere it could obtain entire possession of the heart of Christendom, the old occupant of that heart had first to be fully dispossessed. The memory of Pauline liberty, receding as it was into the distance, and growing ever more dim as the world grew more clear, had still a certain power over the Christian intellect, and a certain charm for the Christian heart. Not without one last battle would freedom quit the field ; if the world had temptations and allurements, the spirit of Pauline Christianity had the strength that springs from early possession of the soil. There must be one great moral struggle ere the child-life of Christianity could exchange the poetry for the prose of existence, and allow the shades of the prison-house to close around its path. And the struggle was coming fast. There was about to sweep over the Western shores a great wave of religious revival,—a wave so strong, so irresistible, that for a time it was to bear away all before it. The mind of the Christian Church was suddenly to be startled from its calm. Already had the outward calm been broken. The sun of worldly prosperity had gone down with the departure of Antoninus Pius, and with the accession

of Marcus Aurelius the night had come. Again had Christianity been called to encounter the sword of persecution—such a persecution as had not been witnessed since the evil days of Nero. But again also was the blood of the martyrs the seed of the Church, and the outward adversity the renewal of spiritual sunshine. In the very depth of its affliction, Christianity awoke to something of its old fervour. It was indeed but a temporary invigoration, such as one sometimes seems to see shortly before death. It was a revival which left behind it little fruit, which was not itself altogether unmixed with worldly alloy, and which was eventually replaced by a darkness deeper than that twilight which it superseded. Yet, defective as it was, erring as it was, unlasting as it was, it was nevertheless the evidence of one great truth,—that there was an aspiration in the spirit of Christianity which all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them could not fill. It must ever be its distinguishing merit that it was the last barrier presented to a worldly ambition—a sincere and final effort to emancipate the Church of early Christendom from those chains of material bondage which the spirit of a secular age was linking fast around it.

## CHAPTER XI.

### MORAL STRUGGLES OF THE CHILD-LIFE.

THE religious revival of which we have spoken presented itself to the opening life of Christianity in the form of a great struggle with the principles of the world ; but, as we have said, it carried within its own bosom some of those very worldly elements which it desired to counteract, and on this account it has often appeared to the church historian in the light of an enigma. It is popularly known by the name of Montanism, and from this it has been supposed that its earliest propagator was Montanus of Phrygia. The leader, however, has long since disappeared from view in the development which his system has received from the hands of others, and it is no longer possible to trace the precise beginnings of this new outburst of Christian life. All we know is, that in the latter half of the second century, and probably amidst the troubles of the Aurelian persecution, there appeared upon the stage of history the representatives of a fresh phase of thought, differing in important respects from all previous or existing tendencies. Their position was so marked out from the attitude of the Church of that day, that they were comprehended under one common name, and



have come down to us with the appellation of Montanists.

Yet, strange as it may seem, these men were not heretics. They certainly believed themselves to be the very pillars of primitive orthodoxy; and in looking back upon their position from the light of modern days, we cannot say that their claim was altogether unfounded. If it be asked why men who were so manifestly bent upon upholding the essentials of Christian truth should have been separated from other Christians by a designation of their own, we can only answer by quoting a historical parallel. The Methodism of the eighteenth century was never for a moment designed as the foundation of a new church party, much less was it proposed as the watchword of a separative sect. It never contemplated the abandonment of the Church of England; to that Church it was attached both in principle and in doctrine, and it felt that to be divided from the home of its nativity would be a great misfortune. But what Methodism did contemplate was the vivifying and purifying of the Church of England, the breathing of a new life into that massive frame, whose members had been paralyzed by long torpor. Methodism was a religious revival—an attempt to turn the thoughts of men more inward upon themselves, and less upon the mere life of outward ecclesiastical forms. Probably, if Methodism had arisen in our day, it never would have found occasion to separate from the Church of England; but, unfortunately for itself, it rose at a period when any increase of religious fervour could only be greeted

with suspicion and aversion, and hence its whole attitude to the mother Church was forced to be one of expostulation and of struggle.

Now, what Methodism was to the religious life of England in the eighteenth, that was Montanism to the religious life of the Christian Church in the second century. It was a revival movement,—an attempt to resuscitate the dormant energies of Christianity,—an endeavour, short-lived indeed, and abortive, yet withal honest and true, to kindle into a glowing flame those smouldering embers of religious life which were now all that remained of the great apostolic fire.

Yet we have said that in this Montanistic revival there was something enigmatical, even contradictory. It could scarcely, indeed, have been otherwise. Every revival, whether religious, or literary, or social, is a reaction; it must find its legitimate province in the effort to restore the balance of power, which has been monopolized by some predominant tendency. But Montanism was a reaction against more tendencies than one. When a community is in the days of its childhood, it is ruled not so much by one fixed principle, as by a succession of impulses perpetually striving for the mastery. The childhood of the Christian Church exhibits at the close of the second century a somewhat similar aspect. Its mind was divided between principles which, being contrary in their aim, could not possibly reign together; and as the undivided reign of any one of them must have proved an evil, it was the imperative duty of a religious revival to protest against the claims of all.

This was precisely what Montanism did—it presented a reaction to certain bad tendencies which had long been striving for empire over the Christian life; and as these tendencies were not only bad, but mutually contradictory, the Montanistic revival was compelled to turn an opposite side to each of them. It is this necessity which has given to modern times an aspect of inconsistency which really belonged to its age. Had it been called to struggle with only one foe, its attitude of opposition would have been clear and indubitable; but as the foes with whom it contended were enemies of one another, it was sometimes constrained to appear as if it were lending help to a cause which at other moments it had repudiated with scorn.

But let us now proceed to consider one or two of those principles against which Montanism was a protest. Nothing could be more violent than its opposition to Gnostic speculation. We have seen that, to some extent, the Church had been indebted to Gnosticism as a source of thought and culture; this was its legitimate province. But when Gnosticism went on to say that thought and culture ought to be substituted for the practical life of Christianity, it became untrue to its own mission, and untrue to that religion of which it should have been the helper.

‘Knowledge is power,’ is the aphorism of a great philosopher; but the author of that aphorism was speaking of practical power. Contemplation loses its value when it is made an end in itself, for all true knowledge must be the parent of high

action, and thought has missed its aim when it issues not in deeds. Gnosticism was not wrong in seeking the tree of knowledge, but it was wrong in desiring to possess the tree without its fruit; and Montanism raised no vain or ill-timed protest when it declared its influence to be lowering and pernicious. But here Montanism, too, transcended its legitimate province. It was one thing to condemn speculation as a substitute for the moral life; it was another and a very different thing to denounce speculation absolutely, and for itself alone. If scientific inquiry should overstep its limits, and seek to subjugate another sphere, it would be highly just and proper to point out the evil of such a course; but it would be highly unjust and improper to conclude from this that scientific inquiry was pernicious in the sphere of science. Yet this was precisely what was done by the revival movement of the second century. Knowledge had been declared to be the essence of redemption; and as the admission of such a statement would have been the dethronement of the Christian life, Montanism did well to repudiate it.

But Montanism did more; it attacked human reason absolutely and unqualifiedly, and with all the vehemence and invective at its command declared the exercise of understanding to be the service of sin. Man was no more able to develop truth than he was able to discover truth; the thoughts of divine revelation must for ever lie without the sphere of the human consciousness, and the soul must find the groundwork of its faith in recognising its incapacity to comprehend. In these sentiments Montanism was at one

with the spirit of the hierarchy—at one with that very tendency which it came to counteract. But here the agreement ended, and the difference began. Joining hand in hand with the rising priesthood in its opposition to the progress of speculation, Montanism broke altogether with that priesthood on the question of a fixed and unprogressive tradition. It could not bear the thought that God had ceased to speak to the world; it could not brook the idea that the past had become the sole repository of the divine commandments. It wanted to think of God not merely as a being who was once operative in the course of history, but as one who, in all history, past, present, and to come, would be found ever progressively revealing His will to man. If it attached importance to the existence of a visible Church, it grounded that importance, not upon the fact that the Church had once listened to the divine voice, but upon the belief that it was always listening to that voice. Montanism, in short, trusted in a progressive revelation. Yet whence could it derive such a progress? It had shut up the avenues of the human mind, and refused a passport to the advance of natural reason. Was there any other avenue through which the will of God could send its messages to the soul of man? Montanism saw clearly, that to close the gates of reason was to shut every natural door to the entrance of divine ideas. But what then? Were there left no supernatural apertures through which the light of God could stream into the heart? Had the miraculous in Christianity entirely passed away? Was there no longer any direct intercourse between God



and His creatures? Had not the divine Founder promised the descent of the Spirit to guide His followers into all truth? Where was that Spirit? Could it be that the outpouring of its influence had ceased with apostolic times?—that influence which had been given, not for a few days or years, but until the end of the world. Such a thought was dishonouring to the promise. Was it not clear, that whatever gifts had been bestowed upon apostles and evangelists had been bestowed upon the Church for ever? and if so, was it not equally clear that the supernatural world was still operating upon the natural? Nor had one any right to assume that this supernatural world was bound to manifest itself to the human soul through the common avenues of sense and reason. These were evil things, products of the first perishable nature. Why, then, should they be dignified into channels of divine revelation? Did not inspiration in the days of old communicate its messages to the spirit in an extraordinary way? Was not Paul taken up into the third heaven? Did not Peter experience in a trance the full import of the kingdom of God? And had not the Spirit still its own ways of working? Had not the Christian still his moments of ecstasy, his heights of supernatural vision, his times of hiding from the world of sense, when his spiritual eye was greeted by sights earth could not see, and his spiritual ear ravished by sounds earth could not hear? These were the true sources of a progressive revelation; these were the only messengers who could bear God's tidings to the heart of man.

Such was the creed of Montanism. It denied that

truth could be known progressively through the development of the human understanding, but admitted that it could be known increasingly by a series of outward revelations supernaturally communicated. Be it observed, however, that even here Montanism was true to itself; for it held distinctly that the Divine Spirit would communicate nothing that was merely interesting to speculative curiosity; all its revelations must be designed for the practical guidance of the Church.

It was at this point that Montanism, if it had chosen, might have entered into strictest alliance with the growing spirit of the hierarchy, and might have secured a place, not, as it has done, amongst Christian heresies, but amongst the most honoured agencies for the propagation of a visible Church. But Montanism was too earnest to be actuated by worldly ambition. Holding, as it did, that the Spirit of God only revealed itself for the Church's guidance, it yet altogether refused to admit that this Church could be summed up in an outward priesthood deriving its authority from apostolic succession. Montanism took its stand upon that basis which has since been identified with the stronghold of Protestantism—the basis of a universal priesthood. It considered every man as potentially a priest. It regarded the consecration of the Spirit as limited by no outward barriers, circumscribed by no visible lines of demarcation. It recognised, no doubt, the necessity for certain conditions to precede the reception of spiritual gifts, but these conditions were not external, but inward; not ecclesiastical, but personal; not dependent upon apostolical

succession, but regulated purely by the attitude of the soul to God.

Thus curiously in one very early system is there presented to our view an embryonic struggle of the Church of Luther and the Church of Rome. We seem in Montanism to have a prophetic epitome of the future history of the Church, a forecast shadow of events yet to be. In its opposition to the claims of natural reason, we recognise in its worst form the foreshadowing of an approaching Papacy; in its rejection of a limited priesthood, we not less clearly behold an anticipation of the great Protestant reaction. Accordingly, to us, the true value of Montanism must ever be, not what it was, but what it signified. Its interest lies in the fact that it *was* a state of struggle, and that as such it pointed back to the past and forward to the future. It showed that there must have been a period in the previous life of Christianity when the spirit of the religion dwelt in freedom, for the very conflict bore evidence that bondage was unnatural to the Christian life. It predicted also the advent of a time when that battle for liberty, which, for the present, was to be lost, would be fought again with more advantageous issue; for it proved that if the inward life of the Church had been conquered, it had been conquered by weapons which are carnal, and therefore incapable of securing a permanent dominion. Yet it must in all candour be confessed, that the very Protestantism of this system had a side which leant towards Rome. That it held fast by the doctrine of a universal priesthood, that it rejected the claims of apostolical succession, that it regarded

the gifts of the Spirit as dependent on the condition of the personal life,—all this is undoubtedly true. But when we come to ask what was that condition of spiritual life which Montanism thus honoured, we shall receive an answer by no means so favourable to the prospective Churches of Luther and Calvin. The rule which the Montanist prescribed was not justification by faith, but justification by asceticism. This system had denounced the exercise of natural reason in the contemplation of religious doctrine ; it went on to denounce the pursuit of natural pleasure in the sphere of religious morals. To the world in all its forms it had conceived a deep aversion—an aversion which had not been paralleled since the days when the Jewish economy attempted to graft into its own life the opening spirit of Christianity. That the inward power of religion should enable a man to endure suffering had always been conceded, but that pain, privation, and sorrow should be sought in preference to joy,—this had never hitherto been asserted in the distinctively Christian Church. Even Gnosticism, in withdrawing from the pleasures of the world, had been actuated by far different motives ; it withdrew because to remain would have been a sacrifice ; there was no joy to the Gnostic like the joy of intellect. But to the Montanist the outward pleasures of life were naturally dear. His nature was essentially more active than contemplative, more influenced by material than by spiritual things. In retiring from the pursuit of these material things, he was inflicting pain upon himself, and he did so with the express design of inflicting pain. He had



no desire to substitute the joy of private speculation for the joys of social existence. Had speculation possessed any charm for him, there would have been no sacrifice in giving up the allurements of the world; it would have been merely a choice of allurements. But when the Montanist lost the world, he lost the only thing which could bring him pleasure, and it was just because he knew this that he determined to lose it. His religion was inextricably associated with pain. It did not occur to him that the cross in Christianity was valuable, not as an end, but as the means to an end. It did not occur to him that religion has never reached its goal until the sacrificial act ceases to be a sacrifice, and becomes the joy of our nature. He revered privation because it was privation, sought suffering because it was suffering, and measured the amount of his spiritual life by the amount of misery which he was able to endure.

In all this there is doubtless to be found the germ of Monasticism, yet it must not be forgotten that the Montanist had a support which the mediæval monk had not—the expectation of Christ's speedy coming. That belief had never yet died in the Church. The fall of Jerusalem had, indeed, removed all hope of reviving the old Jewish polity, and with the departure of that hope there had entered into the mind of the Church a more spiritual conception of the coming kingdom. But never for a moment had Christianity allowed its expectation of a speedy advent to be modified by the surrounding events of the outer world; it still lived in constant anticipation of the



time when the Master would return and restore all things. As the second century approached its close, there rose in the heart of Christendom a deep presentiment that the end of this epoch would be marked by the fulfilment of the great promise, and the pulse of Christianity's young life beat high with the exciting prospect of seeing it realized. Montanism, being essentially a revival movement, was peculiarly susceptible to this impression; unfortunately, it received the impression rather after a Jewish than after a Christian type. Its self-inflicted privations made it long for release, long even for compensation. It had refrained from legitimate worldly pleasures—would not this be made up to it in the future? would it not receive a double portion for every cross it had assumed? And so the heart of the Montanist went out more to the coming kingdom than to the coming King, and dwelt upon that kingdom more in its sensuous than in its spiritual aspect. Unconsciously to himself, he thus went back to that very world which he vainly believed himself to have surmounted, and brought discredit upon that hope of Christianity's child-life which had been its guiding star in many a midnight hour, and its source of returning strength in moments of utter weakness.

We have thus at some length dwelt upon the leading features of one of the most remarkable revival movements which the history of the Church reveals. We have done so the more willingly, because, short-lived as it was, it survived long enough to fascinate the mind of a man whose name has become a household word with the church historian—we mean

Quintus Septimius Tertullianus. His life connects the last half of the second century with the first twenty years of the third, but of the incidents of that life we know next to nothing. It is the aphorism of a distinguished modern writer, that great men have short biographies ; whatever be its general truth, it finds abundant illustration in the Christian Fathers of this period. On all that we are in the habit of associating with biography, the annals of this age are silent. The figures which rise up before the eye are the embodiment of mental conceptions, the incarnation, so to speak, of certain phases of thought. Doubtless the historians of the early Church judged rightly in assigning the foremost place to the inward life of a man, in exhibiting to future ages rather what he was than what he did ; this, after all, is chiefly what we want to know. Of the outward history of Tertullian we are in possession of only two undoubted facts—that he was a native of North Africa, and that he was married. Yet these facts are not without suggestiveness : the former points to the rising importance of that great Church of Carthage, which was long the most Protestant portion of a Church becoming rapidly Roman ; the latter is a protest against the doctrine that celibacy was indispensable to the ancient hierarchy.

The figure of Tertullian himself first arises where that of Irenæus disappears from view ; he takes up the thread of the history where the Bishop of Lyons laid it down. It would seem, at the outset, as if the opinions of Irenæus were to find in Tertullian an advocate more enthusiastic still. Here, indeed, was a

man of far greater intellect than the disciple of Polycarp; let us add, also, of a far narrower sympathy. We never look at his moral portrait without recalling the features of Saul of Tarsus. Between these men, if we mistake not, there exists a striking parallel. There is the same burning zeal, the same moral earnestness, the same reverence for antiquity, the same intellectual vigour, the same inability to look at more than one side of an idea, and, not least remarkable, the same ultimate revulsion from their original standpoint. Both started on the path of life in devotion to the claims of a hierarchy, and with the fixed determination to see these claims realized in history. Both exhibited in the execution of their design an intellectual energy worthy of a better cause. Both displayed a narrowness and bigotry which weakened the natural force of their genius. Both finally deserted the position they had assumed, and became vehement opposers of that hierarchy which they had believed it to be their special mission to strengthen.

Tertullian, like Saul of Tarsus, threw himself originally into the ranks of the dominant church party. With his appearance upon the scene, that church party seems to have increased its pretensions. The distinction between the bishop and the presbyter, which with Irenæus had been at best but dimly marked, broke forth into striking prominence, though even yet the Church was by no means fully ripe for its reception. Along with this distinction there came another and a wider one—the separation of the clergy and the laity. Before this time the priest had been

also a layman ; like Paul the tentmaker, and Luke the physician, and Peter the fisherman, he had dispensed the spiritual bread at the same time when, with his own hands, he was working for the food of daily sustenance. But now the clergy began to magnify their office, and, just in proportion as they did so, they sought to divide the secular from the sacred. A sacerdotal caste was springing up—a caste which aimed originally at mere difference from others, afterwards at opposition to them, and finally at subjugation of them, and which in turn attained to each of these. As yet, it contemplated no more than the establishment of a position distinct from temporal things, and in securing this aim it proceeded slowly and cautiously. ‘It is lawful,’ says Tertullian, ‘for the laity to dispense the communion, but it is no longer expedient ;’ thus gently does he break the first bridge which connected the clerical with the lay element of Christian society. It was fated, however, that the other bridges should be broken by other hands.

Tertullian, doubtless, meant to have advanced in the course he had begun, and intended to complete that work which he believed to be his mission. But to him, too, there came an interruption in the Damascus journey, and by one of those strange transformations which history is unable to explain, the supporter of an incipient hierarchy became the defender of a universal priesthood.

For it was precisely at this critical moment that Montanism appeared—that protest of the religious life alike against the monopoly of intellect and the

tyranny of external power. We have said that history cannot explain the influence of this system upon Tertullian; it was certainly as much opposed to his original views as was that speculative energy of Marcion, which he had already vigorously combated. Yet Montanism had one thing in common with Tertullian, and that was moral earnestness. It was here, we suspect, that 'deep answered unto deep.' There was within his own nature, narrow as that nature undoubtedly was, a fire of religious fervour waiting to purify the world's gold, and to burn its base alloy. In all the existing mechanism of a merely visible Church he had found as yet no adequate field for the outpouring and the utilizing of that spiritual force which was in him. His spirit was too large for the walls which his own intellect had built around it, and it panted to be free. The material conceptions which satisfied his understanding were to his heart but as the swine-husks in the far country. His desires stretched beyond the claims of the hierarchy. The satisfaction of these claims would have given him at best only the possession of divine gifts which had been transmitted through a human medium; but Tertullian wanted direct communion with God. He desired a living, personal union with the Divine Spirit—a union not consummated by the mediation of church or priesthood, but wrought out by the surrender of his own will to the will of the Supreme; and he was ready to welcome any channel of communication through which such a privilege could flow.

Accordingly, when Montanism came, it is not,



after all, surprising that he seemed to find the very thing for which his heart was seeking. Here was a phase of Christianity which promised to lift the soul above the dull, tame level of the world, and the things of the world; which appeared to fan the spirit with a breeze of long ago, and to restore that heart of childhood which outward ambition was beginning to sear. Here was a religion which offered an apostolical succession, apart altogether from priestly consecration, for it tendered to its votaries the possession of that very life which had dwelt within the heart of prophets and apostles. If even at this day, when all its errors have been revealed by the developments of time, the candid historian cannot withhold from it his meed of admiration, can we wonder that an earnest spirit, living in an age of gathering shadows, should have found in it the breath of heaven and the new inspiration of humanity.

And so Tertullian passed away from the Christian hierarchy, and returned to it no more. His schemes of ecclesiastical dominion, his aims after a visible unity, his prospects of high worldly advancement, he left to be reaped by other hands, and sought in the pursuit of asceticism that religious rest which he had failed to find in the pursuit of power. That posterity should have looked kindly on his memory is not strange, for men are ever prone to respect the spirit of self-sacrifice, even where they do not approve the cause which has evoked it. But that Tertullian should have passed out from the dominant church party, and should yet not have lost his influence on that party,—this is, indeed, a remarkable, if not an unparal-

leled circumstance. How seldom in the course of history do we find that a man who has deserted any cause has retained his position of authority in the minds of those whom he has deserted; the pride of human nature itself would oppose such a contingency. But in the case of Tertullian, pride was conquered by esteem. He went out from the comrades of his early years, from the hopes of his early ambition, from the associations which he shared in common with the spirit of his age. He went forth to join a party which, although not yet reckoned heretical, was looked upon by the dignitaries of the Church with marked suspicion and with great aversion. He took a step which virtually pronounced a censure upon all his compeers, and declared the tendency of the time to be radically in the wrong; and what was the result? Tertullian never lost the slightest part of his influence even on the dominant faction, never fell in the smallest measure from the estimation of his former colleagues. His name was still a tower of strength, his voice was still a weighty mandate; and when, a few years later, there arose in his room a new leader of the Christian hierarchy, that leader was not ashamed in the face of united Christendom to declare himself Tertullian's disciple, and to wear that mantle which Tertullian left behind.

## CHAPTER XII.

### FLUCTUATIONS OF THE STRUGGLE.

THE child-life of Christianity had now two motives before it,—the solicitation to self-love, and the natural impulse to self-forgetfulness. One part of its being was centred in the growth of the hierarchy, the other was bound up in the reaction of Montanism; and any record of this period must be one-sided which does not take account of both of these. Let us first consider the relation which Christianity bore to the world in the years immediately following the death of Tertullian. These were years of religious peace. Indeed, in the interval which elapsed between the close of the Aurelian and the breaking out of the Decian persecution, the Church may be said to have enjoyed outward repose. A partial outbreak of intolerance in the reign of Severus, and another still more partial and short-lived in the days of Maximin, make up all the disturbance which Christianity suffered from without during this period. Caracalla and Heliogabalus, infamous as they were in other respects, displayed tolerance towards the religion of Christ. Alexander Severus, who probably ascended the imperial throne the same year in which Tertullian died, displayed something more than

tolerance; the favour he extended to Christianity was so marked, that he has been suspected of being himself a secret convert. Philip the Arabian, whose reign immediately preceded the Decian persecution, has not escaped a similar imputation. It is probable, indeed, that these emperors were not so much persuaded that Christianity was true, as they were satisfied that the ancient mythology was false. It is probable that, sharing in the eclectic tendency of the current Platonism, they were disposed to recognise a truth in Christianity which it held in common with all religions; but even such a persuasion as this proved Christianity's growing power over the minds of men. As usual, however, the outward repose was accompanied by much spiritual declension. Never, perhaps, since the foundation of the Christian Church had there been in its ranks so much apostasy; the love of many had indeed waxed cold. The full evidence of this did not appear till the time of danger; but when again the sword of persecution was drawn, it was seen by the frequent and numerous desertions how far these ranks had diminished in discipline and in zeal. Yet an acute observer might have predicted such a result from looking at the Christianity of this period, even during its peaceful years. Throughout the whole course of the third century, there is a manifest tendency to substitute the form for the life, the symbol for that which it symbolizes. We would not here be misunderstood. It has frequently been averred that the Christians of this period borrowed certain rites and ceremonies from the pagans, in order to conciliate paganism to Christianity. We do

not doubt the fact, but we are by no means disposed to make it a ground of censure. If we concede the propriety of overlaying its worship with so many and such cumbrous forms at all, we see no reason to blame Christianity for borrowing these forms from paganism. It is surely the duty of a new religion to conciliate as much as possible the religion which it dispossesses—to take up into its own light all things already existing that will admit of being transfused into that light. It is a severe wrench to old associations when a man feels himself impelled to quit the faith of his childhood for another faith; and if anything can legitimately mitigate the pang, and make the parting easier to bear, it is surely highly humane to resort to such an expedient. A convert from paganism would be all the more warmed to Christianity because it ushered him into a mansion containing some relics of his former dwelling-place; and on the other hand, these relics would inevitably in the course of time lose their character of antiquity, and become symbols of the new. Nobody is ever the worse because he designates the memorial day of the resurrection by the pagan name of Sunday, or marks the fourth day of the week by the appellation of the god Woden, or describes the fifth by a term derived from the worship of Thor. Nobody, we say, is now the worse for these things, but we are quite safe in affirming that at one time such a use of language would be highly advantageous. The Christianity which supplanted in our country the religion of northern nations, did well not to tear up by the roots everything that bound these nations to the



memories of the past, for thereby it strengthened its own cause, and ultimately became possessor of those very associations which at first had threatened to oppose an impenetrable barrier.

We do not blame Christianity, then, for adopting pagan forms, but we do blame it for attaching to any forms, whether pagan or Christian, an importance beyond their real value. The spirit of the third century tended unmistakeably in this direction. It must be remembered, also, that the multiplication of rites and ceremonies was only one manifestation of a far wider tendency,—the exaltation of a visible Church over the invisible life, the preference of the seen and temporal to the unseen and eternal. Accordingly, with the increase of forms, there came an increase of worldly pretensions. The claims of the hierarchy began at once to be more definitely stated and more rigorously enforced. The priority of the Roman bishop, which had hitherto been conceded as a matter of respect, was on several occasions insisted upon as a matter of right; and those ideas of ecclesiastical dominion, which had been dimly foreshadowed in the *Recognitions* and the *Clementines*, were developed more amply and promulgated more boldly in the *Apostolic Canons* and the *Apostolic Constitutions*. In addition to that pre-eminence of the bishop over the presbyter, which already to a considerable extent had been recognised by the Church, there began to appear something like a gradation in the order of bishops themselves. The large cities being the centres of civilisation, and therefore looked upon as of more importance, gradually came to be regarded as of higher

authority too ; and the sees of Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch, representing as they did the capitals of the civilised world, were seen to lift their heads over the surrounding bishoprics.

All this pointed to the growth of a worldly influence, and showed that the child-life of Christianity was sorely tempted to change its natural standpoint for the pursuit of temporal dominion. In its transition from the sphere of Gnosticism to the sphere of practical life, it was in no small danger of abandoning its questionings for its toys.

Yet the child-life of Christianity was influenced at this period by another and a conflicting motive. Montanism was not dead, and the spirit of Montanism was the spirit of self-sacrifice. The extreme fervour had, indeed, somewhat cooled down, but it was still far from being extinguished. The tendency to isolation from the world, which had found expression in the last years of Tertullian, received yet wider development in the life of the hermit Paul, who buried himself in the depths of a desert, and dragged out an existence of ninety years in utter seclusion from the haunts of men. He became the forerunner of a crowd of imitators, who were in turn the precursors of the great monastic system ; but it was not in this method that the worldly spirit could be conquered. Mere flight from the existing temptation could not retard the growth of a hierarchy, for the desire of empire is in the heart, and a man cannot change his heart by changing his locality. But the spirit of Montanism was to find a nobler expression. It was to be taken up by one who, to all outward

appearance, stood at the opposite remove from it; and who not only never assumed the name of Montanist, but who, during his whole life, was a vigorous supporter of the rights of the outward priesthood, and who strove with unflagging zeal to perfect the glory of a visible Church. It was in this unlikely quarter that the voice of Tertullian was to sound again, as if from the grave.

We said at the close of the last chapter, that the mantle of Tertullian was destined to be taken up, not by a despised heretic, not by a proscribed schismatic, but by a man who was himself recognised as the very leader of the hierarchy; and so undoubtedly it was. The successor to the great Tertullian was fated to be that very Cyprian of Carthage whose name is indelibly associated with the upholding of priestly privileges; and it is a fact still more remarkable, that he proposed to uphold those privileges at the same moment, and with the same voice, in which he defended the claims of personal religion. He strove to unite, and for a short time he actually succeeded in uniting, the rising empire of Romanism with the incipient dominion of Protestantism, and in his life the germs of these two great systems slept side by side, enjoying a moment's union ere they were separated to meet no more.

Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, is usually regarded as a disciple of Tertullian. We do not know, indeed, that they ever met. They were natives, no doubt, of the same country, but between their lives there intervenes a considerable interval. At the time when the star of Tertullian was setting, that of the young

Cyprian was struggling to emerge from the mists of heathenism. His parents belonged to the old world which was dying, to the forms of faith which were passing away; and the youth of Cyprian himself was devoted to that study of rhetoric which was a favourite branch of education with cultured minds amongst the pagans. Is it an unnatural conjecture that, in his search for models, he may have gone to listen to the words of that 'old man eloquent,' who, with a power inspired not by pagan art, but by Christian zeal, was pouring forth torrents of invective against the growth of the hierarchy, and the corruptions of the visible priesthood? If it were so, it is probable that Cyprian received from Tertullian something more than a lesson in oratory; he must have caught some infection from that vehement and fiery spirit. But be this as it may, there is one sense in which he was, beyond all doubt, Tertullian's disciple: the mind of the old Montanist spoke to him through his writings, and the tone of these writings seems to have captivated his soul. Between the two men nature appears, indeed, to have established an affinity. No doubt the Elisha was inferior to the Elijah; it was only a part of Tertullian's mantle that Cyprian could wear. Tertullian, narrow as were the boundaries within which his intellect operated, was yet in his own sphere a man of genius—a man whom nature meant for a speculator, and whom his own resolute convictions alone prevented from having been a leader of the renaissance. Cyprian, on the other hand, was altogether unspeculative; his mind had been cast in a purely practical mould, and no form of

education would have made him a Gnostic. His imagination was not high, his poetic faculty not developed, and he was far more adapted to be a worker than to be a thinker.

Tertullian through conviction opposed Gnosticism ; yet he broke into a region where no Gnostic had ever dared to tread, when he boldly declared that God the Father had a human form. We suspect that his hatred to Gnosticism was his hatred to the bent of his own nature. Cyprian cared for none of these things ; his mind had no wings, and therefore he was freed alike from the dangers and from the sublimities of soaring. To theology as a speculative science he contributed simply nothing. But if Tertullian and Cyprian were unlike in their minds, they had a responsive chord in their hearts. Each had the same virtues, shading into the same errors : sanctity, which bordered on austerity ; warmth, which at times amounted to violence ; strength of conviction, which approached to dogmatism ; and earnestness, which narrowly missed the taint of fanaticism. Both were self-sacrificing men ; yet here we think Cyprian must bear the palm. With him, self-sacrifice was not so much an end, as the means to an end. He never courted martyrdom for its own sake ; on one occasion he went out of his way to avoid it. Cyprian, with his keen, practical insight, knew well that life presented far nobler avenues to self-sacrifice than death. Martyrdom, in so far as it had any influence beyond the sufferer, could only affect others as an ennobling example. But life could influence others by its own force, and by its own helpfulness ; it could surrender itself without dying,



and communicate itself without passing away. Therefore Cyprian valued life, and made it valuable. Few men have ever had so tender a heart for the sorrows of humanity; few have striven more strenuously to mitigate these sorrows. He lives more by his works of charity than by his works of theology, and his own intense human sympathy has left a more lasting monument to the Christianity of his time than all the disputes and questionings which made his age so turbulent and so fruitless.

Such was the man who was destined in his own person at once to advance and to retard the growth of the hierarchy. It was his peculiar prerogative to make universal what hitherto had been only general—the acknowledgment that a bishop was superior to a presbyter. That Cyprian ever voluntarily undertook the office we do not believe; harmonious as it was with his convictions, it was alien to his practical spirit. But Cyprian had no choice in this matter; the presbyters themselves forced on that struggle which resulted in their discomfiture. They began by opposing his election to the see of Carthage,—a fact, by the way, which demonstrates that the practice of disputed settlements, at one time so familiar to Scottish courts, must at least be allowed the prestige of a very high antiquity. Foiled in this attempt, they lay in wait for a new opportunity, and such an opportunity was not long in presenting itself. About this time, many of those who had deserted the Christian Church applied for readmittance. In support of their claim they brought what were called letters of peace—that is to say, certain documents recommend-

ing their reception, and signed by men who had submitted to torture for the sake of Christianity, and who yet had survived their sufferings. These men were named Confessors, and were looked upon almost with veneration. It was not pretended that the letters which they signed were attestations to the character of the applicants; the entire stress was laid on the belief that the signatures of such individuals had a mystical value. The presbyters of Carthage at once acceded to the claim, and prepared to welcome back the recusants into the bosom of the visible Church. But Cyprian had a far different notion of the Christian life; to him, personal purity was everything, and he repudiated the idea that purity could be created by magic. He therefore rejected the application, and demanded that first they should bring forth the fruits meet for repentance. Now was the time for the presbyters to assert their authority, and they did not let it pass. They appealed to their ecclesiastical privileges. Had not the Church received from the very hands of the Master the power to bind and to loose? Was there not an inherent efficacy in the very sacraments of the Christian religion? Did not the partaking of the holy communion carry with it a sanctifying power, —a power to convince and convert and purify? and was it to be tolerated that men desirous to partake of that communion should be withheld from their desire by reason of a past transgression? But Cyprian stood firm. The Church had no power to confer ecclesiastical privileges upon men who had not manifested the aptitude to receive them. There

were many motives of a purely worldly nature which might induce a man to desire Christian communion ; he must prove that his desire was dictated by the love of Christianity. No mere sacrament could make a man holy, and no man living under the power of sin could be declared holy by the mere partaking of a sacrament. Let the parties desirous of readmission give evidence of their returning love ; then, and not till then, would the gates of the Church be opened. The controversy waxed loud, and the passions on each side raged high ; perhaps with neither of the combatants was the religious principle unalloyed. The presbyters were animated by rancour, and Cyprian was not altogether free from the arrogance of superior power. It was clear that the matter must be settled by other hands, and that the Church must decide between them. Accordingly, there assembled at Carthage the most important synod which had met since the great apostolic conference at Jerusalem ; and here, by a definite decree, the authority of Cyprian was confirmed, and the decision of the presbyters condemned. The majority of these submitted, but five of them, with Novatus at their head, refused to be untrue to their convictions, and, separating themselves from the mother Church, they formed themselves into a distinct corporation, and became the congregationalists of the third Christian century. Now what is the interpretation of these facts ? We have only introduced them to bring out that which they indicate. For one thing, it is quite clear that the hierarchy had gained a great victory. The authority of the bishop over the presbyter had been established

in such a way as to preclude any possibility of doubt as to their relative positions ; in this respect, and to this extent, the Catholic Church can claim Cyprian as one of its most powerful supporters. But there is another fact which is equally clear, and which is much less frequently remembered. If the presbyters had been defeated by the bishop, the bishop was on the Protestant side. The presbyters of Carthage were contending, not for Protestantism, but for something which, if recognised as an essential part of Christianity, would have destroyed for ever the possibility of Protestantism. What they wanted was a Church which, by its own infallible dictum, and irrespective altogether of the attitude of personal life, could pronounce absolution for past errors, and restore to the enjoyment of Christian privileges. What Cyprian wanted was a Church which had indeed the power to receive the erring into its bosom, but which could only do so when it had obtained the highest evidence that those who desired such admission had their hearts in the right place. We need not say which of these views is nearer to the Papal, and which to the Protestant standpoint. Strange as it may seem, the presbyters were for once on the side of incipient Popery, and Cyprian, in the very act of advancing the cause of the priesthood, was giving back to Protestantism with his right hand the privileges which he abstracted with his left.

In the meantime, however, the spirit of Protestantism had received a check in another direction, caused by its own inordinate zeal. In the very heart of the capital there had been going on a struggle between

the Roman See and its presbyter Novatian. The grounds of dispute were the same as at Carthage, but, in the present instance, the presbyter was the Protestant. Novatian, indeed, had gone to a length which Cyprian never dreamed of. Cyprian had asked no more than delay before readmission, and had asked that delay only with the view of affording time for the evidence of repentance. But Novatian declared that in no circumstances whatsoever should the lapsed be readmitted to communion, that those who had once fallen away could never be restored, and that no amount of penitence or expiation would justify the Church in reinstating them in their former privileges. Such extreme severity met with sympathy from no side; the Roman See condemned it, and Cyprian himself strongly disapproved it; but Novatian was inexorable. In defiance of popular opinion, in defiance of Roman condemnation, he maintained that his opinions were in conformity with the true spirit of Christianity; and, prevented from holding these opinions by the mandate of the visible Church, he withdrew from the communion of Rome, and set up a Church of his own. This intolerance was highly unfavourable to the spirit of Protestantism. It was not merely that the views of Novatian were condemned by the Roman See; his personal defeat was the smallest part of the check. The real evil lay in this, that the reproach of Novatian extended to the views of Cyprian; and the noble struggle for individual purity, which had been maintained by the Church of Carthage, became associated in the mind of the Roman priest-



hood with the unforgiving and relentless policy of Novatian.

Rome now began to look upon Carthage as an enemy, and to see in the Church of North Africa a barrier to its own schemes of dominion. Moreover, about this time there ascended the throne of the Roman bishopric a man whose marked abilities were equalled by his daring ambition; it was that Stephen whose name has been handed down as synonymous with that of the growing hierarchy. This man, looking forth with a discerning eye upon the world of his day, saw clearly that until the inherent efficacy of the sacraments was acknowledged, there was no hope of an ecclesiastical dominion. He perceived that, to the attainment of this end, Cyprian, who remained in the Church, was as great an obstacle as Novatian, who had gone out of it; and therefore he directed all the force of his character to counteract the principles of the Church of Carthage. An opportunity soon offered itself. Two Spanish bishops, who had been deposed from their office for desertion in the time of danger, appealed to Stephen against the decision. Stephen declared the deposition to be null and void, and commanded that they should be reinstated in their dioceses.

Against this mandate the Spanish churches in turn protested, and sent two deputies to lay the matter before the Church of Carthage. That Church, true to its principles, boldly revoked the decree of Rome, and in a synod at which Cyprian himself presided, declared the original sentence to

be in full force. Cyprian appears now to have regarded the act of the Roman bishop as a challenge to war, and he resolved promptly to accept it. He had already defended the claims of personal purity against the sacrament of orders; he prepared to follow up the blow by asserting the claims of the individual life against the inherent efficacy of baptism. The Roman Church regarded baptism as valid, even though administered by a heretic, for it looked upon the validity as belonging to the ceremony itself. The Church of Carthage, however; had all along held a different view on this matter, and it now proceeded to legalize its view. It declared in a public council, that any man who had received baptism from a heretical sect, and who desired readmission into the visible Church, must be re-baptized by orthodox hands. The result of this step was an immediate conflagration. Stephen burst into transports of wrath. He had been arrested in the dearest object of his life. His claim to superior power had been treated as a dead letter; and, as if to mark the last stage of insult, the immemorial practice of Western Christendom had been not only set at defiance, but summarily condemned. That this proud bishopric, of an origin so comparatively recent, should presume to dictate to that chair of St. Peter, whose antiquity was almost coeval with Christianity itself, was a thing not to be tolerated and not to be atoned for. Accordingly, there was fulminated against the Church of Carthage a thunderbolt of excommunication, which, a few centuries later, would have

brought Cyprian to his knees; but the time for Papal dominion had not yet come. In proportion as Stephen waxed violent, Cyprian grew calm; but it was the calmness of increased determination, not of fear. He had asserted the authority of the bishops over the presbyters; he was by no means disposed to grant the authority of Rome over the bishops. A new council was assembled, embracing not merely the Church of Carthage, but the leading prelates throughout the region of North Africa, and these with a unanimous voice confirmed the proceedings of the former convention. Deputies were sent to Rome, bearing in firm but respectful terms a report of that course which they had decided to follow. Stephen refused to see the deputies, and appears, in the blinding of rage and disappointed ambition, to have forgotten even the prudence which worldly policy should have dictated. The sentence of excommunication was repeated and extended, and the whole North African Church was declared to have forfeited its claim to communion with the Roman hierarchy. Cyprian met the new attack with a calmness approaching to contempt, and prepared to maintain his position with the same resolution which he had evinced in assuming it.

And now it seemed as if the days of Scipio and of Hannibal were about to return, and as if, on Christian ground, Rome and Carthage were to fight a fourth Punic war. In the view of all Christendom, stood in the attitude of battle two indomitable spirits; both able, both earnest, both convinced of the integrity of their cause, and both resolved never to

yield. Suddenly both were enveloped in a cloud, and were lost to the eye of history. That cloud was Valerian's persecution. Never had the worldly sunshine been so bright as immediately before the storm. So far had the emperor been from seeking to molest Christianity, that his household had been chiefly composed of Christian retainers, and even now he was influenced rather by the suggestion of others than by his own personal convictions. Yet these suggestions prevailed, and the calm was broken. The breaking of that calm was a boon to Christianity; the war from without brought peace within. And here again was strikingly exhibited the truth, which every persecution had illustrated, that the points in which Christians were agreed were more conspicuous than the questions on which they were forced to differ. Stephen and Cyprian had been divided in their lives. Their opinions of church government were altogether different; their views of the priestly office could never exist side by side. But in the heart of each of them there was something deeper than church government, and more essential than the office of priesthood; it was the spirit of Christianity itself. They had blamed each other, opposed each other, struggled with each other, and had they dwelt much longer on their differences, might have come to hate each other. But Valerian's persecution dispelled their differences, and brought their points of agreement to the front. They found that to be Christians was more than to be bishops; that to rule their own spirits was higher than to be rulers of the hierarchy. And so these men, so



antagonistic in their lives, were united in their deaths. Their last act was one of perfect concord, for it was the surrender of their hearts to the influence of one common love; and, like Peter and Paul in the days of the Gentile controversy, those leaders of the Church, whose paths had lain so widely separate, were joined together by the martyr's crown.

But the principles for which they struggled still continued. Stephen and Cyprian were only representative men—representatives of the two conflicting motives which strove for mastery over the child-life of Christianity. They passed away, but the discordant motives remained, ready again to manifest themselves when the sword of persecution was withdrawn. The struggle was yet undecided; the world was strong, and the thirst for pristine freedom was also strong. The combatants on each side seemed equally matched, and it was hard to predict the issue. But there was a silent cause in operation which was sapping the strength of one of them, and an eye which could look beneath the surface might indeed have foretold the end. The child-life of Christianity had not yet resolved to give up its freedom, but it had nearly resolved to resign its poetry. While the West had been the scene of religious conflict, the East had been the theatre of declining culture; and when culture expires, the freshness of religious faith has not long to live. Religion, as it seems to us, is inextricably associated with the spirit of poetry. The nation which of all antiquity was most filled with God was that Hebrew nation which was able to



express itself in sacred song. Religion demands an ideal, and it is the purest imagination which conceives the purest ideal. Let imagination be dwarfed or overshadowed, and the ideal grows faint and dim ; let the ideal be robbed of its lustre, and the life is robbed of its moral elevation. The child-life of Christianity was enthroning Christ in its opening reason, but it was permitting His image to fade from its conception ; the poetical was sinking into the prosaic, and the prosaic was no longer the antagonist of the worldly. To the consideration of this great decline we shall advert in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### DECLINE OF THE IDEAL.

WHILE Cyprian and Stephen were wrangling about the claims of the hierarchy, there fell a star from the firmament of Christian literature—one of the last of that bright galaxy which had been kindled by the renaissance of the second century; we allude to the death of the great Origen. His life had carried on the illumination from the days of the Alexandrian Clement to the days of the Carthaginian Cyprian; and of that illumination he was himself nearly all that survived. He was but sixteen years old when the second century closed, and already had the glory of literature departed. New and troublous times were rising—times of worldliness and ambition and materialism; and Origen had to bear his lamp in the darkness almost alone. Yet it seemed as if nature were about to compensate for the fewness of great lives by the intensity it was to lend to one. The literary labours of Origen were so vast in their number and variety as almost to defy computation: Epiphanius says he was the author of six thousand volumes; Jerome says he wrote more than any man could read. Perhaps in these writings what one most admires is the writer. That he

contributed to theology as a science anything of imperishable value, we do not believe. Some of his opinions are grotesque, many are fantastic, all are more the product of poetry than of reason. Yet in their poetry there are often flashings of real light—light which sometimes leads astray, but which is clearly meant to guide; and through them all there shines the spirit of a genuine man, high in aspiration, deep in devotion, in purpose earnest, in imagination pure. It is not, however, as a theologian that Origen most claims our attention. He may be regarded as the founder of one of the most interesting of all religious sciences—biblical criticism. As long as men looked for an immediate coming of the Master, they were naturally disposed to underrate the importance of any written record, however inspired. Those who expected to behold in their own lifetime the advent of the light itself, were not likely to spend much labour in analyzing those books which professed to be histories of the light. But with the third century such expectations had begun to fade. The spiritual outburst of Montanism had indeed seemed to detect the sign of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven; but Montanism itself was rapidly becoming a thing of the past, and its anticipations were dying along with it. Accordingly the child-life of Christianity, shut out from the contemplation of an ideal future, was forced to contemplate the possibility of an ideal present, and began to turn its gaze upon the materials for weaving such a vision. If it could not have the immediate presence of a visible Master, the next best thing was the possession of a record which would

exhibit the moral features of that Master, and it was surely its first and imperative duty to study minutely and carefully the meaning of this record. Such we believe to have been the origin of biblical criticism. It was the effort of Christianity's child-life to vivify its conception of the Master's portrait after it had lost the hope of immediately beholding His presence. And if already in this there was a decline of the ideal, the decline was thus far not a loss, but a gain. Criticism means judgment; and when the life of childhood exhibits opening judgment, it already gives promise of the man. Poetry is of little use when it is divorced from the yearning for truth, and separated from the search for knowledge; fancy may exist in the next stage to infancy, but imagination only comes with the power to distinguish the false from the true. We think, therefore, that the birth of biblical criticism, as it appeared in the life-work of Origen, marks a real stage of development in the unfolding of the spirit of Christianity; and we shall not consider it altogether irrelevant to pause for a few moments and examine this new phase of Christian thought.

There are two extreme tendencies to which biblical interpretation has at different times been subjected,—the literal and the allegorical. The literal lays hold of the meaning on the surface; the allegorical seeks a meaning beneath the surface. The literal makes the essence of Christianity its facts and historic incidents; the allegorical regards the idea enveloped in the facts as the only important thing. The literal is the tendency of Judaism; the allegorical

is the distinguishing feature of Strauss' *Life of Jesus*, of the theology of Baur, and of the school of Tübingen. The literal is always the earlier mode of interpretation, because it is more allied to those things of sense which at first engage the opening mind. But there comes a time when even childhood wakes into the consciousness of a life beneath the visible. The fairy tale is an allegory, and the picture book is an allegory, and childhood cannot thoroughly revel in these until it has come to discern more than meets the eye. We find, indeed, that the tendency to break away from the letter of Scripture had very strongly manifested itself so early as the second century, and had obtained peculiar prominence in that Church of Alexandria which had been the inaugurator of Christian speculation. But just as the dreams of the child-life are apt to weaken its practical power, so the mystical nature of Alexandrian thought was in danger of becoming highly unfavourable to Christian work. If the letter without the spirit is death, the spirit without the letter is a reverie approaching to death, and the Eastern Church of the opening third century wanted much a man who could restore the balance between them. Then came a change; the balance was not restored, but it was reversed. Alexandria had risen up to be one of the great centres of social life, and as it grew nearer to the Roman similitude, it became more enamoured of the Roman ideal. The hope of a worldly empire, and the dream of a secular glory, took possession of that Church which had once been the home of thought and culture, and the East became gradually



infected by the materializing atmosphere of the West. This worldly tendency, when it had once been allowed a footing, penetrated into everything, and tinged even speculation. The mystical sense of Scripture sank indeed into desuetude, but it dragged down along with it the spiritual import too. A new age of literalism was approaching—an age in which the meanings of the sacred volume were limited to the time and place in which they were uttered. If a passage were true then and there, it mattered not though it might not be true now and here; its significance must not be stretched beyond the circumstances of the time which evoked it. That was Tertullian's view of Scripture, and it became for a while predominant. It ushered the mind of the Church into an iron age; it limited the horizon of human vision to the objects of the passing hour; and it robbed Christianity itself of that universal power which has enabled it to speak to all times, and has given its utterances a meaning for the circumstances of all hearts.

It was at this critical moment that Origen appeared. He offered himself as the pioneer of a new science,—a science which should restore to Scripture its universal application, and which should unite into harmony the conflicting thoughts of men; which should render to the world the things which were the world's, and to the spirit the things which belonged to the spirit. Origen perceived that there were three casts of mind, with which any universal revelation would be bound collectively to deal. There were empirical minds, unable to soar beyond the

things of sense ; there were practical minds, whose whole thought was concentrated upon the just performance of life's duties ; and there were speculative minds, which could never be happy except on the wing. Scripture must have a voice for each of these. It must speak to the first in the facts of history, to the second in the precepts of morality, and to the third in the intuitions of philosophy, and in each separate statement the three voices must be combined. The same passage which to one man contains merely a fact, must to another be allowed to bear the force of an exhortation, while to the heart of another still it may suggest a thought too deep for verbal description. On the very foreground of this theory we are arrested by its spirit of Protestantism. Origen takes it for granted that the Bible ought to be a universal book, and in this he was already at variance with the spirit of the hierarchy. Irenæus had attempted to curtail the liberties of the laity in the reading of Scripture. Tertullian, at one time, had endeavoured to take away that liberty altogether ; and the leaders of the Alexandrian priesthood in the days of Origen himself opposed him with all their force, and obstructed him with all their influence. But Origen persevered ; through obloquy, through persecution, through exile from his native city, he pursued his great life-work of adapting the Bible to the universal mind.

If in his expositions he grows more warm when he catches a mystical interpretation, if in pursuing such interpretations he seems often to be borne away by the force of a poetic imagination, we must re-

member that in his mind was concentrated all that remained of that poetry which had ennobled the child-life of Christianity. In him we see the momentary revival of a light which was about to set—a gleam of sunshine intervening between a cloud which had passed, and a denser cloud which was coming. We must remember, too, that all high criticism, whether it be biblical or literary, presupposes the enthusiasm of a lofty ideal—an enthusiasm which is often prone to extravagance, but which is never capable of meanness. The man who would criticise a great poem must himself be pervaded with the spirit of poetry,—in other words, must have an imagination behind his judgment. The man who would analyze a great religious book must, apart altogether from questions of inspiration, be permeated with the spirit of religion, must have within his heart an ideal of what the sacred portrait should be. We know very well that there are those who have taken another view of this subject. There are some who would ask from the biblical critic little more than a knowledge of language, grammar, and the logical rules of interpretation, coupled with a mind of natural acuteness. Every man is entitled to his own opinion; but it seems to us that such a view is to transform criticism from a means into an end. It appears, moreover, to be borne out by historical experience, that wheresoever an age has adopted the standpoint of judgment unmixed with feeling, wheresoever it has come to the task of interpreting the Christian records with a mind altogether indifferent to either their truth or their falsity, their beauty or their deformity, it has

received from them no greater warmth than it brought to them, and has emerged from their perusal with the same indifference with which it entered upon the work.

And, indeed, such an age was rapidly approaching. At the moment when Rome and Carthage were about to enter on their great struggle,—at the moment when the controversy between spiritual life and worldly ambition was trembling in the balance, Origen passed away, and there followed in the East a great reaction. A new school was springing up—a school which professed, indeed, to be founded on the principles of Origen, but which wanted that one element which made Origen so powerful, the element of a poetic idealism. Its headquarters were fixed, not at Alexandria, but at Antioch, and therefore at the very outset it was removed from those high associations which had given wings to the literary revival of the last century. The spirit of Antioch was altogether different from the spirit of Alexandria. Both schools might be called speculative, because both sought for truth through other sources than mere authority, but the speculations of Antioch took a far inferior flight. The Alexandrian Church had been led into great and frequent errors, but they were the errors that sprang from a lofty and noble enthusiasm; it was carried away by the force of its own feelings, and erred only because its capacities were unequal to its desires. But the Church of Antioch approached the study of Scripture with an absence of all feeling. It determined to enter upon the task of interpretation after throwing a veil over its previous impressions. If it



had already derived, by spiritual inheritance, any tinge of religious enthusiasm, or any bias in favour of Christian truth, it resolved to throw this into the background, and keep its testimony in abeyance. The standard which this Church proposed for itself in the interpretation of Scripture was one of pure reason, of cold, analytic judgment, which would accept only the meaning which first rose to the surface, and allow no previous convictions to suspend the conclusions of the hour. It brought to the most spiritual book in the world that material measurement which men apply to temporal things, weighed its mountains in scales and its hills in a balance, and interpreted its noblest doctrines and precepts, not by the voice of genuine feeling, but according to the dictates of the sensuous understanding.

Such was the Church which now began to lift its head over the ancient school of Alexandria; and the fact that such a church could obtain such prominence is already a proof that the child-life of Christianity was passing from poetry into prose. And now, indeed, it began to appear, that to analyze with the mere logical understanding the portrait of the Christian life, was the sure way to dim the perception of that portrait. Those Christian beliefs and doctrines, which had exerted such vital power when perceived through the medium of the heart, lost one-half of their lustre when subjected to the crucible of the sensuous reason. The moment men endeavoured to picture them after the fashion of earthly things, a mist seemed to gather over those forms which had once been bright. The child-life



of Christianity, exchanging the eye of poetry for the eye of prose, found that thereby the spiritual world had itself become prosaic to its view. At the very outset, there came a great decline in its thought of God ; in trying to conceive Him definitely, it lost the conception of Him altogether. Hitherto the heart of Christendom had been content to be conscious of a divine presence whose form it could not image, to feel the breath where it could not see the face. It had thought of God, not as He was in Himself, but as He was in relation to the human soul, and therefore its thought of Him had been the idea of a perpetual presence. It had never pictured Him as a cold abstraction, dwelling remote from all His works, and incapable of entering into the life of the universe ; on the contrary, the life of the universe had been to it a breath of His life, a wave of His ocean, a spark of His eternal fire. Even the God of Gnosticism, incomprehensible as He was, was not uncomprehending. He dwelt, indeed, in a secret place, but it was not the secrecy of distance, but the secrecy of a hidden life. The hiding-place was somewhere in the very heart of the universe, and ever and anon from its deep recesses there would come forth flashes of His infinite glory.

Gnosticism had contemplated the ages of this world as the days of a golden year—the life of eternity in the midst of time. And as long as the poetic spirit awakened by Gnosticism survived, this thought of God was abiding. But since those days the child-life of Christianity had been brought into con-

tact with the world. It had looked upon the Roman empire, and had seen in it a grand ideal of earthly greatness. It beheld in the Emperor of Rome what the followers of Confucius had beheld in the Emperor of China—an image of changeless power, incapable of increase or of diminution, unable to advance with the ages, or to adapt itself to the exigencies of men—a power which was weak through its very absoluteness. Hence, to the child-life of Christianity the grandest thing in the world became the thought of changelessness; of an existence so self-contained and so self-sufficient, that it never desired to pass out of itself. Its conception of God became the conception of a Roman emperor in the heavens, exalted above all His followers as the master is exalted above the servant, and only related to His creatures as he who commands is related to those who obey. The God in whom man lives and moves and has his being, passed away from the heart of Christendom, and in His room there was enthroned in that heart the image of a God in the air, separate from His works, isolated from His creatures, solitary by His very changelessness, and changeless by His perpetual solitude.

This is the creed which has come down to us by the name of Sabellianism—the worship of a will that is above every will, and of a power that cannot bend. Into its theological aspect we enter not, but this was assuredly its spiritual aspect, its tendency, its ideal of divine greatness. And the centre of this belief was that very Church of Antioch which had professed to construct the portraiture of the

Christian life by piecing together the conclusions of abstract reasoning. It is true that ultimately that Church pronounced it a heresy, but heresies are only the explosion of tendencies which have been long existing. The fact that this belief found its chief promulgator in an actual bishop of Antioch, and the fact that one of the largest councils ever assembled in that city was obliged to separate without condemning his opinions, must be regarded as undoubted indications that Sabellianism was in harmony with the spirit of the age.

But now it was to be seen that the fall of one ideal must drag down others in its train. Sabellianism was the parent of Arianism. If the idea of God were that of a being who sat enthroned in eternal solitude, there clearly was no room left in it for the person of Christ; that would have broken at once the solitude and the changelessness. Accordingly, there began to dawn in the heart of Christendom the conception of a new Christ. Hitherto, indeed, men had approached the person of the Master from different sides. The first century, in conformity with the opening of religious life, had fixed its eye upon the human form, and followed it from stage to stage in its ascent to the divine. The second century, in its freshness of intellectual vigour, had reversed the process; it had fastened its attention upon the divine life, and had traced it in its descent to the humiliation of the human form. Each of the views separately had a richness of thought peculiar to itself, and the union of the two had constituted a perfect portrait. But now there was rising up the picture of a Christ who was

neither human nor divine, who was neither man nor God nor angel, but something different from each, and separate from all. The Christ of Arianism was a created being—created, indeed, before all others, but still the product of the Supreme Will. He was not only infinitely above man, but infinitely superior to the highest angelic intelligence. Yet his nature was not divine; he was inferior to the Being who created him. It would be difficult to conceive an ideal more unfavourable to the development of the Christian spirit. A purely human Christ might have been an example; a purely divine Christ might have been a strength; but a Christ who was neither human nor divine could be neither an example nor a strength. It was one of those beliefs which could only have originated with an age that had lost its poetry, lost its aspiration, lost everything but its weights and measures. Its source, indeed, was the Church of Antioch. Arius was no more the founder of Arianism, than Luther was the founder of Lutheranism. He was only that last straw which broke the back of the camel, or, to keep our old figure, he was the man in whose hands the tendency exploded into a heresy, and leapt out in flame over the boundaries of the visible Church. Arius, though a resident in Alexandria, himself professed to belong to the school of Antioch. It must be confessed, however, that there was a wider influence at work than that of any individual church whatsoever—the influence exerted upon Christianity by the pagan world itself. Hitherto that influence had been chiefly ritual, and this, as we have seen, was not



of necessity demoralizing; but it was now extending itself into the sphere of theology. We have said that the God of Sabellianism was an exaggerated Roman emperor; it was in strict conformity with this that the Christ of Arianism should be an exaggerated Roman minister. Such is, indeed, the thought which lies behind the system,—the idea of a man who is the favourite of his sovereign, and who, through favour, has been exalted to the similitude of a king; who has been commissioned to act as his master's deputy, to issue his laws, to receive his tribute, even to punish and to pardon in his name. The prevalence of such a belief demonstrates how completely the mind of Christendom had been Romanized—how entirely the pagan ideal had taken possession of the heart of Christianity.

We have now, indeed, arrived at that period in which the Roman State and the Christian Church were potentially united, and only waited for outward circumstances to make them actually so. Perhaps, therefore, this will be at once the most suitable place and the most favourable opportunity for indicating in what light we propose to regard this remarkable amalgamation,—in what way we intend to view that union of the Empire and the Cross, which has been by some so highly lauded, and by others so vehemently decried.

Let us bear in mind at the outset that this is not the abstract question of establishment or disestablishment; it does not of necessity even touch that question. A man who is attached to voluntary principles will, of course, object to the union of this



particular church with this particular state, in the same manner, and on the same grounds, as he will object to the union of any church with any state. But it is quite possible that a man may be sincerely attached to the principle of establishments, and yet think that this principle was here badly exemplified. It is quite possible to be persuaded that an amalgamation of Church and State is in the abstract desirable, and yet to hold that this particular amalgamation was in the concrete pernicious. This position has actually been taken by some, whose convictions have been in favour of union between the Church and the world. For our part, we are not disposed to side with either extreme, or rather, we are inclined to think that each extreme has a germ of truth in it. Over this union of the Church and the Empire we neither wish to blow a blast of triumph on the one hand, nor to pronounce a funeral oration on the other. We would like to consider the question calmly, dispassionately, if possible philosophically, and consistently with that plan of development which we are endeavouring to establish. It is a question which has clearly two sides, and any historical review which overlooks or underrates either of them must be liable to the charge of partiality; we shall therefore glance at the subject in both aspects.

And, first, as to the adverse side. It is, to our mind, quite clear that the union of Christianity with the Roman State was accomplished in part by the fall of Christianity from its primitive purity. We think it just as impossible that the Church of Paul or the Church of John could have entered into union

with Rome, as we do that the empire of Augustus or the empire of Tiberius could have entered into union with Christianity. Paganism was even then tottering, but, as we have remarked once before, loyal men often cling more tenaciously to old beliefs when they see them confronted by new ones. On the other hand, Christianity was then fresh and young, and was by no means disposed to make any compromise with the world. But now things were changed on both sides. Paganism had become little more than a relic of the past; long abandoned by the philosophers, it was every day losing its hold even over the mass of the people. Christianity, too, had lost something. We have seen how it was brought into contact with the world, and how, from that contact, it did not emerge stainless. We have seen how, from enmity to the Roman ideal of greatness, it subsided into indifference, and how, from indifference, it warmed up into admiration. We have seen how admiration itself gave place to resolve, and how within the heart of Christendom there rose the design to emulate the imperial majesty of Rome. The moment that design had arisen, Christianity was potentially united to the world—was ready to be at one with the world whenever the world was ready to be at one with it. It had come half-way to meet Rome in that hour when it embraced the Roman ideal. It had set before itself the possibility of being an empire within an empire, a state in the midst of a state; and it was clear that it could only accomplish this possibility by recognising itself as a province of the Roman emperor, by consenting

to wield an authority derived from external power. This was the preparation of Christianity for its union with the Roman State—a preparation which involved a stooping from its own lofty eminence, and a supplanting of its own high ideal. It drew paganism near to itself, because it first aspired to approximate to the outward empire of paganism, and therefore its union with the imperial power cannot be hailed as exhibiting the unaided triumph of Christian principles.

But if this union cannot be hailed as a triumph, it can as little be repudiated as a misfortune. It is absolutely necessary that every child-life should pass into contact with the world. This contact in the individual childhood is purchased by a temporary fall. The influence of worldly motives exerts for the time a lowering tendency, and throws a mist over the morning sky. Yet no one would, on that account, prefer to see the child-life restrained from worldly contact; the object purchased is worth the price paid for it.

In the case of Christianity, the same principle must be allowed to hold; its temporary fall is made a link in the chain of its destiny. The destiny of Christianity was to rule the world. It was to rule, not by force, but by influence; not by action from without, but by suasion from within; not by impelling the hands, but by purifying the heart. It was to act upon the world by bringing its own motives into competition with the world's motives, and by demonstrating, even to natural reason, that it was fitted to secure a higher and a more lasting good. But did

not this very destiny necessitate a knowledge of the world? Before Christianity could outweigh the selfish impulses of the human heart, it had to learn at once the nature and the strength of these impulses, and it could only learn them by an experience of them within itself. Christianity had to pass through the world, in order to know the world; had to feel the power of its temptations, in order that it might vanquish these temptations. It had to subject to its own inward scrutiny the natural motives of the human soul, that it might find in them what was wheat and what was chaff, what was the pure gold and what the base alloy. It is in this way, and in this way alone, that we can explain its long centuries of seeming retrogression, its search for temporal dominion, its efforts after physical power. Unless we regard these centuries as a waste—and, as we have said, we cannot do so—we shall be forced to consider them as links in a great chain of development; links passing, indeed, underground, and through darkness, yet connecting a bright past with a still brighter future. Such is the spirit in which we intend to regard these centuries of worldliness. We shall not seek to palliate their immoralities; we shall not attempt to excuse their selfishness; but we shall endeavour to see how all their weighty errors were helping, unconsciously to themselves, to rivet more closely the links of the golden chain.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE CHILD-LIFE UNDER THE WORLD'S TUITION.

IT will be seen from the foregoing pages that we are disposed to regard the union of the Christian Church with the Roman State, not as an act which was accomplished at a definite time, but as a process which was carried on through many years. If this view be correct, it will be evident that the most important part of the union had its consummation, not, as is generally supposed, in the beginning of the fourth century, but during the latter half of the third. The glory of this union of Church and State is commonly ascribed to the Emperor Constantine, but in truth it found in him rather its occasion than its cause. There are some men who are great because they lead; there are others whose greatness lies in following. The leaders of an age mould the course of history; the followers are moulded by it. The non-existence of the leaders would have made the annals of mankind substantially different. If Napoleon Bonaparte had never lived, we are quite safe in affirming that the history of Europe, from 1796 to 1815, would have been materially altered. But the men who have been great by following the tendencies of their time would not have affected the course of



history by having failed to come into the world ; their place would have been supplied by others.

The union of Church and State was consummated in Constantine, but it would have been consummated without Constantine ; it might have been a few years or even a century later, but the result would have been all the same. The spirit of an age must embody itself ; if it should fail to find one incarnation, it will create another. The spirit of the third century pointed to union. We have seen that it did so with Christianity, but it did so even with paganism. It is true that, during the latter half of that century, and beyond it, the Christian Church was subjected to persecutions more general than any which had preceded them ; but even here there was a great change. The persecutions of Decius, of Valerian, of Aurelian, and of Diocletian, were only more general because they were dictated by the will of a single despot, whose power reached over the entire empire. They were no longer the outbursts of popular hatred, or the ebullitions of local prejudice ; they originated, not with the nation, but with the men who ruled the nation, and even these men were actuated rather by worldly policy than by religious animosity. We have seen that pagan beliefs themselves were losing their power over the masses, and that they had long ago lost it over the philosophers. Secular philosophy was, indeed, nearly extinct, and classic literature had passed away, carrying along with it the brightest associations of pagan worship. The Church had still a few such names as Origen and Dionysius of Alexandria ; but the State had no Origen, no Diony-

sus. Therefore it naturally looked to Christianity for light, and began to dream of rekindling with Christian fire the embers of its dying faith. An age of eclecticism had come—an age when men were disposed to accept truth wherever they could get it, and in whatever form it was presented to their view. It is a state of mind which may be produced by the highest culture, but which may be created without culture by the mere sense of unrest; and so was it here. Rome had weighed its gods in the balance, and found them wanting; it craved for something better, yet it shrank from demolishing the relics of its ancient glory, and it sought to find some truth which, while transcending them, might yet comprehend them. The Roman people were already willing that Christianity should be recognised as one truth amongst many, and this was itself a concession. The religion of Christ had begun to manifest that marvellous power of adaptation to all scenes and circumstances which distinguishes it from every other faith, and by that power of adaptation it had revealed its utility even to the pagan world; it had become too useful to be altogether rejected. We have already alluded to the fact that Valerian's household was composed chiefly of Christian retainers, and that fact is very suggestive; it shows that, in the judgment of the pagans themselves, the Christians made the best servants. We learn from other sources that they made also the best soldiers; nor is it strange that it should have been so. The spirit of Christianity, which is essentially the spirit of self-sacrifice, is fitted to animate

and to ennoble every form of human life. It carries into all the spheres of existence those qualities which have made it great, and it imparts to those spheres the greatness which is its own. The Roman world saw its professions and avocations shine more splendidly when united with this new life; and while yet unable to recognise it as the one and absolute good, it was constrained even now to believe in it as a source of lofty power.

This, then, was the position at which things had now arrived. The world was growing weary of its conventionality, and was longing for something of the simplicity of childhood. The child-life of Christianity was growing weary of its simplicity, and was longing to be trained for the world. These two tendencies, approaching each other from different sides, were destined to meet together and to constitute a great union of hitherto conflicting powers. The union was to be consummated by two outward lives: one on the side of Christianity, the other on the side of paganism; one coming forth from the recesses of the Christian faith and advancing to meet the Roman world, the other emerging from the depths of the Roman world and advancing to the frontiers of Christianity; the one was Eusebius of Cæsarea, the other was the Emperor Constantine.

Eusebius, Bishop of Cæsarea, whom Constantine declared fit to be bishop of the world, was born ten years after the death of Origen, and six years after the martyrdom of Cyprian; and as his life stretched over three-quarters of a century, he preserved in his person the continuity of the Church's history, and

connected the child-life in its preparation for the world, with the child-life in its stage of subjection to the world's tutelage. He was, indeed, exactly the man for such a period of transition. That his attachment to the principles of Christianity was sincere we have no reason to doubt, for he was himself a sufferer in Diocletian's persecution. But while he was sincerely attached to Christian principles, he was by no means impressed with the importance of Christian dogmatics. Had Eusebius belonged to the Church of Scotland during the eighteenth century, he would inevitably have been branded with the name of 'Moderate;' indeed, we know of no word which can so fitly express his theological position. It was not that this man preferred practice to theory. His reading was vast, and his knowledge surpassed that of any Christian father since the days of Origen. But the subjects of inquiry in which he delighted were not scientific, but historical; he loved to analyze rather the deeds than the thoughts of men. His nature, in truth, was as far removed from poetry as it was from science. His life had fallen upon prosaic days, and he had himself imbibed deeply of their tendency. His imagination was not high, and therefore his spirituality was not deep. His intellectual estimate of Christ was affected by the shadows of the empire. He was not, indeed, an Arian, yet he had considerable sympathy with Arianism, and for Arius himself he retained a personal respect, even after his views had been condemned by the Council of Nice. He seems to have prided himself in belonging to no party. He pro-

bably assumed this attitude in order that he might exercise his gifts of mediation ; this, in fact, was his peculiar province, his mission, his destiny. His special work was the preparation of Christianity for the world, and in accomplishing this work he found it expedient to bring out into bold prominence the points in which the world was prepared for Christianity.

One of his books was written for the express purpose of establishing this mutual relationship ; he collected here all those sayings of the illustrious heathen which could be construed into harmony with the Christian spirit. The union of Church and State was to him the culminating glory of Christianity, the highest peak of its fame. It was after the consummation of this union that he deemed the time had come for writing a history of the Church. He wrote that history, not with the eye of an impartial judge, but with a side-glance to the claims of expediency, recording what he thought would exalt the religion, and omitting what he feared would lower it. He did not forget, at the same time, to write the life of Constantine. He was too politic a man to pronounce a eulogy upon one side alone. Eusebius was pre-eminently a politician. He was free from religious enthusiasm, his judgment was cool and clear, his aims far-reaching, his estimate of the importance of worldly influence exceedingly high, and his manners courtly and conciliatory. This was precisely the man to fascinate such a mind as that of Constantine. That he could be classed amongst the best men of any age we do not believe ; that he could be taken as the



highest representative of Christianity in his own age we dare not affirm; but we have not the slightest doubt that he was better adapted for his own special work than any other man of his day. We believe Athanasius to have been a higher type of Christian, but we have no hesitation in saying that Athanasius would never have been to Constantine the mediator between Christianity and paganism; he was too one-sided, too stern, too uncompromising. He would have presented his religion to the emperor rather on the side of its contrast than on the side of its agreement, and therefore, at the very outset, he would have been in danger of repelling that pagan world which he had come to attract. But Eusebius was not one-sided, not stern in the promulgation of his own views, not uncompromising towards the views of others. If this proceeded from an absence of religious enthusiasm, it doubtless lowered his qualifications as a man, but it heightened them as a mediator. The union into which Christianity was about to enter was a political union, and therefore it had to be wrought out by a politic mind. It was a union in which worldly considerations were mingled with religious motives, and therefore it demanded in those who would mediate it an adequate knowledge of worldly principles. On these grounds, we are inclined to believe that Eusebius was the man for the hour. Incarnating, as he did in his own person, alike the virtues and the vices of his age, he was well qualified to represent in his individual life the present attitude of Christianity as a whole. In him men saw the religion in its power of adaptation, in its capacity

for appropriation, in its tendency to blend with existing things, and, in the very act of blending with them, to exalt and ennoble them. In him they beheld Christianity on the side of its utility, and that, for the men of such an age, was the strongest recommendation in its favour. Too corrupt to be attracted by the beauty of its precepts, they were yet drawn into its light by the beneficence of its work and the usefulness of its instrumentality, and they found these qualities exhibited in all their power in the life and labours of Eusebius of Cæsarea.

Here, then, was one of those lives which were to complete the union of the Church and the world; this was the life which was furnished by Christianity. But another was also required. There must be an existence approaching the same goal from the opposite side—an existence furnished not by Christianity, but by paganism, and such a man was found in the Emperor Constantine. Into the events of Constantine's life it is neither our intention nor our province to enter, except in so far as these were subservient to the great purpose of his history. His father, Constantius Chlorus, belonged to that order of eclectic minds in which truth is sought irrespective of dogmatic system. He seems to have entertained for Christianity the respect which one has for any belief which embraces any part of the circle of truth, and it is highly probable that he early communicated this bias to the mind of his son. It appeared, indeed, at first, as if Constantine's opinions, whether favourable or unfavourable to Christianity, could have had no possible influence upon the destinies of that

religion. He had received by inheritance, not the Roman Empire, but only a very small part of it.

Diocletian, weary with the cares of government, had abdicated the sceptre, and retired into the repose of private life. The empire had been divided into four sections, each presided over by its own governor. Political complications had still further increased the disunion, and ultimately there might be said to be six Roman emperors, each absolute over his own tract of country. Of these, one was decidedly pagan, four probably indifferent to any religion, and the remaining one disposed, at least, to favour Christianity. This last was Constantine. It was clear that the chances were five to one. So many emperors could not possibly live together in peace; their interests were conflicting, and their aims ambitious. The unity of the empire must eventually be restored, and it was just as likely that it would be reunited under Galerius or Licinius, under Maximian or Maxentius, as under Constantine. Yet this last alternative was precisely what happened. Slowly, yet surely, by a variety of events and circumstances, the universal sceptre passed into the hands of him who was more disposed towards Christianity than any of his colleagues. One by one these colleagues melted away, till Constantine alone remained enthroned in undisputed dominion. With Maxentius, indeed, the struggle was fierce and long. Three times the opposing ranks met in deadly conflict. On the last occasion the scene of battle was the banks of the Tiber, in the very vicinity of the imperial city. To this battle tradition has assigned

the important place of marking the crisis in Constantine's spiritual life. We are told that, when the contest was about to begin, the eye of the emperor was arrested by a wonderful apparition. In the blaze of noonday, he appeared to behold in the heavens the form of a luminous cross, and upon it were inscribed these words, 'By this conquer.' The tidings were communicated to the army, and there ran through the ranks that thrill of enthusiasm which ever attends the belief of being the favourites of Heaven. The cross became their watchword of battle, and by it they indeed conquered; Maxentius, flying in terror from the field, was drowned in the waters of the Tiber, and Constantine marched victorious into the undisputed empire of the West. The story is probably true. When the destinies of a man are trembling in the balance, and when his mind is on the stretch with excitement, it is no strange thing that he should see what he wishes to see. The God of Judaism, who was also the God of Christianity, had been all along recognised as the God of battles. Hence, even in Tertullian's days, it was no uncommon thing for Christians in the military service to bear about with them the image of a cross. The cross, already the symbol of the Christian's glory, became thus to the Roman the symbol of military glory, the omen of success in war; and we need not be surprised that Constantine, in his eager desire for victory, should have thought the heavens to have said that which he wanted them to say.

But whether the story be true or false, it is marvelously suggestive. 'By this conquer;' these words

are the key-note to Constantine's Christianity—to all the Christianity which personally he ever attained. To him the religion of Christ was not an end, but the means to an end, a road to conquest—a source of political greatness. It was the course which was pointed out by expediency, the path which was dictated by worldly wisdom. Constantine was a brave man, a sagacious man, perhaps even a benevolent man, but he was far more a politician than a devotee. He saw that paganism was dying, and that by no skill could it long be kept alive. He saw that Christianity already embraced at least one-half of the empire, that in Rome itself there were forty Christian churches, and that everywhere the influence of the religion was expanding. He was far-sighted enough to perceive that, if the empire ever regained its pristine glory, it must be by the infusion of a new life into the old elements; and as he had himself no prejudice against that new life, it was clearly his interest to see it incorporated with the crumbling fabric. Accordingly, by a series of edicts, each increasingly favourable to the Christian religion, he gradually prepared the minds of his people for that event which he perceived to be inevitable. And when at last, by the death of Licinius, he obtained over the East the same dominion which he had already secured in the West, he no longer hesitated to proclaim the union of the Christian Church with the Roman empire. Yet, in spite of the testimony of Eusebius, there is no sufficient reason for believing that the Christianity which he professed as an emperor belonged to him as a man. No line of demarcation can



be drawn between his moral acts before and after the event; nay, the deed which has affixed the deepest stain to his memory followed the consummation of the union. He retained to the last many pagan practices, and he refused to receive baptism until the moment of his death was approaching. It seems, therefore, a legitimate conclusion that the device upon the luminous cross expressed the length and the breadth of Constantine's Christian faith. He was in search of conquest, and he grasped the strongest weapon; he accepted the cross because he saw in it the talisman of victory.

We have now arrived at one of the most important epochs in the spiritual history of Christianity. The child-life was about to enter upon its stages of secular education. We say secular, because although the coming period was more theological than the foregoing, it was on that very account more allied to the human. The child-life had hitherto received divine truth through the medium of spiritual intuition; and as long as it retained possession of its high Christian ideal, that medium was all that could be desired. But we have seen how 'the gold had become dim, and the most fine gold changed.' The ideal of Christian life had faded through the influence of worldly contact, and the poetry of the renaissance had been succeeded by the prose of the empire. Rome had now offered itself as the teacher of the child-life, had promised to initiate it into the worldly mysteries, and had held out a prospect of reaching temporal dominion. Christianity closed with the offer, and by so doing adopted the worldly

standpoint. It was resolved, indeed, to prosecute its religious education, but henceforth this must be prosecuted after a secular manner ; spiritual intuition must give place to theological system. Those truths which had faded from the heart must be revived in the reason, and those thoughts which were felt in the soul must be imaged in the understanding. This was the new stage on which the Church was entering—the stage in which the child begins to lose its childhood ; in which the opening mind is no longer content to possess its treasures, but is impelled to examine them, to analyze them, to dissect the materials of which they are composed. Another world has begun to dawn when we have passed from the perception to the theory of things.

Christianity, then, was about to enter on its school days, and therefore it had to be prepared for an education which is distinctively scholastic. For there is a great difference between the education of a child and the education of a man. The man, by a series of outward experiments or inward experiences, arrives at some conclusion for which he is not seeking. The truths to which he attains are at present unknown to him ; he keeps his mind unbiassed, sits with docility at the feet of nature, receives from day to day the instruction which each separate fact communicates, and at last, as the reward and crown of all, obtains a new principle of action, a new law of life. But far otherwise is it with the child. That mode of tuition which is best adapted for manhood would be pernicious to the opening intelligence. The mind which would arrive at a general truth from the induction of

particular facts must be already a developed mind, else its conclusions will be pervaded by fallacies. Accordingly, the child must receive its lesson, not at the end, but at the beginning; it must be told what it is expected to learn; it must accept the truth at first on authority, and then proceed to verify it in actual experience. This is the mode of education which is called scholasticism, which began to foreshadow itself at the union of Church and State, and which found its culmination in the atmosphere of mediæval theology. Men have often sneered at it, and if set up as an absolute standard, it would be worthy of being sneered at. But scholasticism was not an absolute standard. Those who lived under it thought it to be so; but the subject should be viewed, not through the thoughts of individual men, but in the light of a great plan of development. Seen in that light, scholasticism appears not, indeed, as the road to ultimate truth, nor yet even as the highest form of human tuition, but as a process well adapted to that stage of Christianity's life which it was designed to train, and admirably suited to prepare the days of childhood for the work of maturer years.

We have said that the education of the child is founded upon the reception of truth on authority, but this clearly implies that the child-life must have already awakened to a sense of its own dependence. It was therefore necessary that the spirit of Christianity should be subjugated by the spirit of the empire. The world was to be its teacher, but if so the world must first be its master; before it could receive truth on authority, it must be impressed with

the authority itself. The empire, indeed, was soon to find this a more difficult task than it had counted upon; meanwhile it lost no time in asserting what it believed to be its rightful position. Constantine changed the seat of empire from Rome to Byzantium, and this city was thenceforth called from his name Constantinople. The act was fruitful in consequences both for the future and for the present. We shall see that in the future it raised up to the Roman hierarchy a rival power, which long restrained the efforts of its ambition, and contributed in some respects to preserve the Protestant element. But in the meantime this act of Constantine was depressing in its effect.

For the first time in the Church's history, the East had an emperor in its own vicinity. At an earlier period this might have restrained the speculative spirit of Christianity, by opposing to it the sword of heathen persecution; that danger was indeed past. The emperor was a nominal Christian, and Christianity was now sure of protection. But the speculative life of the Church, in avoiding the danger of one extreme, had only fallen into another. The East had always been the well-spring of intellectual vigour. It was here that had arisen the great Christian renaissance which had shed such glory over the second century. It was here that the Protestant element had maintained a steadfast ascendancy when the spirit of the hierarchy was diffusing itself far and wide. It was here that, under the influence of Origen, the Christian intellect had first directed itself to a definite system of interpreting the Bible. It was here that the world-



principle was longest and most successfully resisted, and the shadow of the empire most consistently excluded. And although latterly the stream of intellectual vigour had begun to dry; although the poetry of the renaissance had long since passed away; although here, as everywhere else, the world had begun to exert a pernicious influence, there still remained in the Church of Alexandria some yearning for ancient freedom, and some respect for those opinions which had been the heritage of Christianity.

When, therefore, the capital of the Roman Empire was transferred from the West to the East,—when, into the very centre of Christian thought, there came one wielding the authority of absolute dominion, and seeking, without theological knowledge, to exert that authority upon theological belief, there was too good reason to apprehend that the well-spring would cease to yield its waters. The secular power of Constantinople was to the Church of the fourth century what the Papal power of Rome was to the Church of mediævalism. It would almost seem, indeed, as if the incorporation of Christianity with the state had renewed the notion of a Jewish theocracy, in which the king was God's representative, and united in himself the highest functions in the disposal both of civil and sacred things.

The Roman emperors appeared to the eye of Christendom as God's anointed leaders, who were commissioned, through the rod of outward dominion, to propagate the spirit of the Cross. With such a notion, it is not surprising that the East felt its strength departing, and, abandoning its hopes of self-



dependence, bowed down in reverence to a divinely delegated power. Yet, as we have said, there were traces left of the old life and the old spirit, momentary outbursts of freedom like memories of a golden age. Not even Roman power, not even Judaic reverence, could altogether restrain the child-life of Christianity. The fourth century is distinctively the battle-field between the traditions of the past and the material influences of the present. With its theologies, its councils, its heresies, its religious controversies, we have nothing to do ; we have to see by what process the outward union became an inward one, by what train of circumstances the relationship of external interest became a relationship of mutual goodwill, and the heart of Christianity's childhood was reconciled to its home in the world. To the consideration of this point we must now proceed.

## CHAPTER XV.

### LAST EFFORTS OF THE SELF-WILL.

IF at this period the life of Christianity had been concentrated on one definite aim, it might at the very outset have impressed the Roman State with the difference between union and conquest. Incorporated as it had been with the empire, it might yet have preserved its diversity in unity, and have inspired its new protector with a respect approaching to fear. But the child-life of Christianity had become a divided life; it was no longer animated by a single aim, but drawn asunder by conflicting motives, and therefore the strength which naturally belonged to it was dissipated by want of concentration. It was not long before a singular instance of this was afforded. It seemed good to Constantine that the outward unity of his own power should be mirrored in an inward unity of Christian thought. Accordingly, he connived at the summoning of that Council of Nice, which proved the largest and the most remarkable assemblage which had yet met together in the cause of Christianity. With its theology, indeed, we have no concern, nor was its theology its remarkable feature. We have no doubt that its doctrinal opinions expressed the

ultimate voice of the Church, but we think also that they somewhat anticipated that voice. The child-life of Christianity was scarcely ripe for such a scientific statement of primitive truth, and it proved in the sequel that it was unripe for it. But from our point of view, the interest of the Nicene Council lies in the fact that it exhibits a confluence and a conflict of three centuries. It would seem here as if time had wished to recapitulate the results of Christianity's past history.

Around the imperial throne three distinct ages appeared to cluster. The spirit of the second century was there, incarnated in a youth of eight-and-twenty, who here first entered upon the struggles of his long and troubled life—we mean Athanasius of Alexandria. There was much in him that recalled the days of the Christian renaissance. In his early years he had been greatly influenced by the asceticism of the hermit Antony, and perhaps his own nature had unconsciously aided that influence. The character of his mind was so pre-eminently intellectual, that the search for knowledge would in any circumstances have been more to him than the pursuit of worldly gain, and in this respect he was a true descendant of his illustrious forerunner, Clement. With the theological tendencies of the past he had also much sympathy. We have seen how these tendencies pointed almost exclusively to a divine Christ, and sometimes by their very intensity led men to forget that there was a humanity too. Athanasius denied not the human, whilst his ideal was the divine Christ; and, absorbed in the thought of His divinity, he left

the earthly side to be approached by other minds. Perhaps the very asceticism which led him to undervalue temporal things may have rendered him too forgetful of that which was finite in Christianity ; but whatever tinge of one-sidedness his mind may have received, it is impossible to deny that in him the Nicene Council beheld Christ's religion in its purest and least corrupted form ; it experienced a memory of the far past.

Then, over against this spirit stood another, which came as the memory of a past more recent and nearer to the light of common day ; the third century stood represented here in the form of the presbyter Arius. In him Christianity appeared already merged in the shadows of the empire, pointing to a God whose only attribute was sovereign will, and a Christ whose only pre-eminence was that deputed sovereignty which he had received as the Governor of the world. Here, too, appeared the third century in its reaction against the hierarchy, in its revolt of presbyter against bishop, in its efforts to give prominence to the voice of the individual man ; for Arius was here in the position, not only of a suspected heretic, but also of a recognised schismatic.

One other party remained ; it was the party of worldly accommodation, and consisted of the men who had incarnated the spirit of that present age. They were represented by Eusebius of Cæsarea, whose character and policy we have already described ; they would fain have shelved the theological question in the interest of peace, and were eager to adopt some formula whose kindly vagueness would

admit the views of all disputants. The Council of Nice was thus at once the meeting-place and the contest of these historical tendencies, which had grown up through the course of many generations; and here it was to be decided whether the new life was altogether to cover the old, or whether the spirit of the remote past was still to have a voice in directing the course of Christian history.

The decision of the Council of Nice was in favour of the latter view; it affirmed the doctrines of Athanasius. It is not at first easy to discover the cause of this. There can be no doubt that the Eusebian party, through the very absence of religious enthusiasm, had more sympathy with Arius than with Athanasius; there can be equally little doubt that, had the Eusebian party thrown in its lot with the Arians, the orthodox section would have been defeated; this, indeed, actually happened almost immediately after the Council had been dismissed. But the Eusebians, whatever might have been their sympathies, did not at this time side with Arius, and what is stranger still, neither did the emperor. Before the meeting of the Council, Constantine had been heard to remark that the matter in dispute was a mere trifle. The question in its scientific aspect must to him, indeed, have been nearly unintelligible, and, so far as it was intelligible, he probably sympathized most with Arius. Yet no sooner was the decision of the Council pronounced, than the emperor endorsed it as his own opinion, and made it the law of the land. Various explanations have been suggested to account for this change. It has been attributed to conviction,



awakened by hearing the arguments ; to the belief that the Council's decision was the indication of God's will ; and also to the least worthy motive of wishing to support the stronger cause. None of these views quite satisfies us. We think the explanation, both of Constantine's conduct and of the conduct of the Eusebians, will be found in an ecclesiastical rather than in a theological source. We have said that Arius was not only a heretic, but a schismatic ; he was a presbyter of Alexandria, at open war with his own bishop, and that fact alone was highly prejudicial to the success of his views. Men who were quite incapable of understanding metaphysical distinctions had no difficulty whatever in understanding this. The emperor, who had pronounced the question of Christ's eternal generation to be a trifle, saw nothing to be trifled with in an act of insubordination. Such an act, if suffered to pass with impunity, would engender in the state the spirit of revolution, and might eventually strike at the roots of royalty itself. Accordingly, from motives not altogether mean or selfish, yet essentially politic and political, he lent his authority to the decision of the Nicene Council, and proceeded with the most rigorous exactitude to enforce the observance of its decrees.

Arius was condemned and banished. Here already we see the introduction of a pagan element into the practical life of Christianity. That element had first influenced Christian ceremonies ; it had afterwards affected Christian theology ; it was now to operate upon Christian practice. That a heretic is

a criminal, and should be treated as a criminal, had all along been the doctrine of paganism. We have elsewhere seen that the Roman state regarded all acts of impiety as infringements of secular law, for in that state the secular and the sacred were not so much united as identified. Accordingly, the Roman Empire was quite consistent with itself when it inflicted civil punishments upon religious offenders; it was only carrying out the principle it professed. But this had never been the principle of Christianity; indeed, as long as it remained apart from the state, it was impossible it should hold such a view. The Church had from the beginning inflicted punishment upon those who had lapsed from the faith; but the punishment had always been of a religious nature, and had consisted generally of simple exclusion from church privileges. Nor was there any reason why the union between the Church and the empire should have produced any change in this mode of enforcing ecclesiastical law. Christianity might have preserved all its relations to the Roman state, and yet have retained intact this mark of its ancient freedom. It never seems to have occurred to the men of that day that they were giving up more than union demanded, and it never seems to have occurred to Constantine that he was asking more than Christianity was morally entitled to give. We are convinced that, had the Christians made a united stand for the retention of their own executive government, the emperor would have found it expedient to yield; they did not do so, and the result was that transference into Christ's religion of a new and pagan

element, which found its miserable consummation in the horrors of the mediæval Inquisition.

It was not long before a striking proof was given that even a weak cause may be made strong by persecution. Arianism was in itself thoroughly inadequate to meet the wants of the Christian life, but it derived strength from suffering more than its due. The sympathy of the Eusebian party was especially aroused, and as that party was high in favour with the emperor, its influence was sure to make itself felt. Accordingly, there followed a great reaction in popular feeling. Arius was recalled and made to offer an explanation of his views, which rendered their heterodoxy less conspicuous; and on the strength of this, Athanasius, who was now Bishop of Alexandria, was commanded to receive him again into communion. But Constantine here found that he had a different man to deal with—a man who belonged to the old regime, and who held fast by the claims of spiritual independence. Not even to him, indeed, did it occur to question the emperor's right to dispose of his civil freedom; he, too, seems to have admitted this as a point involved in the union. But Athanasius felt that, whatever power Constantine might have over his person and effects, he could have none over his religious opinions; this sphere he claimed as his natural, his hereditary, his inalienable possession, and he would suffer the foot of no intruder to enter here. He was not afraid, therefore, to deny the validity of the emperor's command over his conscience; and in what he believed to be the interest of Christian truth, he refused to restore Arius to the

fellowship of the Church. The result was what might have been anticipated—an immediate reversal of the emperor's sentiments. Arius, who a few years before had been proscribed as a man unworthy to discharge the duties of the Christian ministry, now appeared in the light of a martyr, who for a trivial difference of opinion had been made to feel the weight of an episcopal tyranny. Athanasius, who a few years before had been extolled as the representative of primitive Christianity, now appeared in the light of a despot, who had sought to import into his own office the prerogatives which belonged to the empire alone. And with this change in the sentiments of the emperor, the feeling of the Church at large was too ready to sympathize. That tinge of asceticism which pervaded the character of the Alexandrian bishop, rendered him no favourite with that influential Eusebian party, which wanted to make the best of both worlds. Accordingly, the voice of Constantine found a responsive echo in the voice of a Church whose standard was not high. A new council was assembled at Tyre, to undo all that had been done by the old, and Athanasius, almost the last remaining embodiment of a Christianity which had once been supreme, was dispossessed of his episcopal office, and banished from the home of his fathers.

The breach between the primitive Church and the State was now about as wide as it possibly could be, and the rent was all the more apparent because it was seen in contrast with an outward unity. It may be doubted if there is not to be found a more genuine

respect for Christianity in the pagan empire of the second century than it exhibited now in the days of its so-called conversion. Nor is it wonderful that it should be so. The empire of the fourth century was no longer the empire of the second, nor was the Christianity of the fourth century any longer the Christianity of the second; the classic glory had departed from the one, the depth of spirituality had deserted the other. The empire saw in the Church only a weaker edition of itself, and despised its puny efforts to emulate that which was beyond its sphere. If Constantine judged Athanasius by the average standard of contemporary churchmen, it is not surprising that his estimate was not high. Was there no hope of a change in this relation of things? Was there no possibility that the attitude of Church and State should become as harmonious inwardly as it already was outwardly? Were there no means by which the mutual disrespect could be eradicated, and a mutual sympathy established? It seems to us that in order to accomplish this there were wanted three things: the arbitrary tone of the empire must be lowered; the moral tone of Christianity must be heightened; and from the heart of the empire there must come forth a mediating life, attracted towards Christianity, not like Constantine, by the worldly advantages which it offered, but by its own inherent beauty, and its own indwelling power. Dark as was the present aspect of affairs, this century did not pass until all these things were fulfilled.

And the first of them was already at the door. While Athanasius and Arius were representing the



battle-field between the old and the new, the Emperor Constantine himself passed away, and that mighty structure, which his own genius had repaired and strengthened, began thenceforth to crumble and decay. The empire, which he had brought from division into unity, was at his death again divided. The East and the West, which had, from the beginning, been separated by a gulf of spiritual distance, were now parted asunder by the additional barrier of a political disunion, each being placed under its own sovereign. Sixteen years afterwards, indeed, the empire for a time regained its unity ; but the wound was cicatrised, not healed. Never again for any long period was the dominion of the Roman world wielded by one sceptre, and ere the century closed, its Eastern and Western branches were permanently parted. And this change in the aspect of the political world had a powerful influence upon the external fortunes of Christianity ; it made the emperors more cautious. They were no longer supreme ; they were no longer the undisputed arbiters of the world. Each felt his power to be circumscribed by a rival power, and each required to strengthen his personal influence by all the resources at his command. The empire could no longer afford to act towards the Christians with despotism ; the time for arbitrary will had passed away. Constantius, who mounted the throne of the East on the death of his father Constantine, was a professed Arian ; yet his very first act was to recall Athanasius to his liberty and to his bishopric, and that prelate entered Alexandria in triumph. It is true that three years later he was an exile again,

but that was not by the exercise of an arbitrary imperial will, but because worldly prosperity had made Arianism for the time predominant. There came, indeed, a season when Athanasius had to endure the weight of an imperial authority to which he had hitherto been a stranger, when a price was set upon his head, and when flight was his only escape from death ; but it happened precisely in that brief period in which the empire regained its unity ; the renewal of its division brought the renewal of peace.

A time, moreover, was approaching in which the Western power was to require all the aid of all its subjects. Fresh young nations were coming from the North to prey upon its borders—Goths, Vandals, Suevi, Heruli—names which have ceased now to designate anything in modern life, but which yet represent the seeds of modern Teutonic Europe. Some of these had already received the elements of the Christian religion ; and however imperfect their Christianity might be, they probably accepted it with more ardour than that Roman world, which was weakened with luxury and worn out with long indulgence. Ulphilas had recently translated the Scriptures into the Gothic tongue, and this may be said to have formed the starting-point of the religious life of Germany. These Northern tribes, receiving Christianity with a Protestant bias, received along with it an increase of fire and energy which made them still more formidable to the empire, crippled as that empire was by the division of its strength. The Gothic tribes standing arrayed against the institutions

of the Roman world formed a striking prophecy of that long religious struggle which the descendants of both were to conduct in mediæval Europe—a struggle which, beginning with the eleventh century, was culminated with the sixteenth, and which, originating in the rights of kings, found its legitimate consummation in the assertion of the rights of every man.

Here, then, was the first condition to the establishment of a more respectful relation between the Church and the State—a lowering of the empire's arbitrary tone; and this condition, as we have seen, had already begun to manifest itself. The second requisite for such a relationship was the heightening of the moral tone of Christianity; the religion of Christ, as represented in its members, must be seen to be worthy of respect. And the preparation for this moral advancement was also at the door. Dark days were coming. The child-life, as we have seen, had still some yearnings towards that period when it was unfettered by authority, and when its self-will was its only arbiter. It was about to be transported back to that period—to regain its outward circumstances without its inward purity; and it was about to find, in its bitter experience, that self-government is only valuable when the ruling principle is rooted in justice and in goodness.

In the year 361, Julian, the last of the house of Constantine, ascended the imperial throne, and immediately proclaimed the restoration of paganism. We can hardly wonder that he should have done so. The Christianity which he had seen had been of a very mutilated type. To himself personally it had brought nothing but sorrow. His life had been one long

series of persecutions inflicted by those of his own household, and therefore he had been introduced to the Christian religion under the guise of family jealousy. When he turned from these home associations to contemplate the outer world, he found that Christianity, since the union, had done scarcely anything to ameliorate the condition of the human race. Constantine, it is true, had abolished the pagan sacrifices, and put an end to the gladiatorial exhibitions, and, had circumstances favoured his efforts, he would probably have accomplished much more. But the circumstances which arrested the practical progress of the Christian life were the quarrels of the Christians themselves—quarrels which diverted the emperor's mind from the spirit to the forms of the religion. Accordingly, when Julian arrived at power, he found that the Roman people had as yet experienced no moral elevation from the change, and his was one of those minds which desired moral elevation. He, like Athanasius, had his life centred in the past; only the past which he sought was the golden age, not of Christianity, but of paganism. He went back with fond desire to the days of classic culture and philosophical inquiry, when Rome wielded more than a sceptre of physical power, and when its proudest boast was to be the focus of learning and civilisation. The glories of antiquity had in his mind taken the place of all theories of future progression, and the paradise which was lost was more to him than any Utopia which coming ages might disclose. Therefore, instead of advancing, he sought to retrace his steps, and he began his retrogression by restoring



the faith of his fathers. The strange and also the significant fact is, that he should have deemed such a step politically safe. Forty years had not passed since Constantine had found it expedient to make Christianity the religion of the empire; and now Julian, after reaching with hard climbing the pinnacle of power, was not afraid to inaugurate his government by sweeping away the edicts of his great predecessor. The fact speaks volumes; it shows what a small and miserable thing Christianity had become in the last forty years, and it points, at the same time, to the source of its true greatness; by demonstrating that no mere external power could ever have propagated the religion of Christ, if it had not possessed within itself the element of moral strength. Its external support had never been so strong as during these years, but its moral strength had all the time been fading, and with the dying of its spiritual force there had come the dissolution even of its outward power.

The apostasy of Julian produced for the moment consequences highly unfavourable to Christianity. At the time when Constantine had made it the national religion, it had been embraced by a large party in the empire, just as any new fashion of dress or manners might be embraced, provided such had received the stamp of royal approbation. With these, of course, the merit of Christianity vanished when it ceased to be the fashion, and they readily relapsed into the practices of pagan worship. In the Church itself there were also numbers whose love had waxed cold, and who were ready to accommodate themselves to any circumstances which might arise; these accord-



ingly subsided into a purely negative attitude, and waited to see what course the stream of events would follow. The result was, that the Christian religion had at this period a larger number arrayed against it, or at least a larger number indifferent to its interest, than even in the days when paganism had been the long-established faith of the empire. It has frequently been remarked that there are no enemies so bitter to a church as those who have apostatised from it; in this respect also Christianity was at a disadvantage. It is true that Julian was too much a philosopher to be a persecutor; in embracing paganism he proclaimed toleration to all. By toleration he certainly did not mean that either side was to be restrained from expressing its intellectual convictions; he himself wrote against the Christian religion. It soon appeared, however, that what would be tolerated in the strong would not be borne in the weak. When Athanasius on his side imitated the example of Julian, he did so at his peril, and only by another flight into exile escaped death from the hands of the infuriated populace. To demand that Christianity should exercise such a tolerance towards heathenism as to repress in speech and writing all the reasons for the hope that was in it, was tantamount to asking that it should gradually cease to exist, and therefore the so-called toleration of Julian's government amounted to little less than a form of persecution.

And yet it is not difficult to perceive that this darkness was the turning-point of the night—the harbinger of an approaching dawn. If it separated those who had never possessed any other bond of union than

conventionalism, it at the same time drew together all those earnest spirits who had hitherto been sundered by diversities in the form of their faith. These began to realize under the pressure of adversity that there was something in Christianity deeper than those points on which they disagreed, and their differences were lost and overshadowed in the imperilled interests of the Christian religion itself. Many who had vehemently opposed Athanasius upon questions of scientific theology, were ready to rally round his banner in the defence of that which was the very spirit and life of Christianity; and those who a few years before had exiled him as a traitor, were now prepared to applaud him as a martyr in the cause of truth.

Upon the whole, one is disposed to regard this adverse episode as a source of spiritual prosperity. Severe as it was while it lasted, its duration was but brief. After a reign of two years, Julian fell in battle, and the empire returned to the outward profession of that faith which Constantine had imposed on it; and Christianity from this period appears in some measure to have renewed its life, to have regained, for a time at least, something of its pristine strength. Already, with the latter days of this century, the monastic system begins to assume a definite form, and in another hundred years it is an influential power. It is easy to call this a retrogressive movement; it is not difficult to find in it many points of retrogression, but these were its abuses. The movement itself was the offspring of religious fervour, and sprang from a deep-rooted and not erroneous conviction that the religion of Christ had

suffered in the process of transition into the world. If, in its eagerness to remedy these injuries, monasticism, especially in the East, receded too far from the haunts and pursuits of men, we may respect the motive where we doubt the efficacy of the method. Of this at least we may be sure, that the increasing prevalence and widening popularity of the monastic life indicated on the part of the religion a desire to refresh itself at some spiritual stream. We shall see in after years how powerful this agency proved; we shall see how it spread some form of Christianity into lands which might otherwise have received none; we shall see how to many heavy-laden souls, from the crowned sovereign to the houseless peasant, it brought a refuge and a rest from the burden and heat of the day; we shall see how in many cases it helped to keep alive that spirit of Protestantism which through all the ages never wholly died. All this was the work which awaited it. In the meantime, let us not despise its small beginnings, nor treat too severely the errors which encompassed them. Let us seek rather in these to mark the faint streak of a better day, and to behold the life of Christianity emerging from the shadows of the night.

We have now glanced at two of those conditions which were requisite to produce inward harmony between the Church and the empire. A third remains; there must be a mediating life, a life of transcendent genius, in whose culture and acquirements Church and empire alike could claim a share. And this condition, too, was on the road to its accomplishment.

While the Roman world was relapsing into the days of its paganism; while the Christian world was realizing the depth of its own degeneracy; while, in the person of Julian, the combined forces of outward power and philosophic strength were brought to bear upon a religion whose outward power had been weakened, and whose philosophic strength had departed, there was growing up in Numidia a child of mighty destinies, whose life was to restore to Christianity both the one and the other. In him were to be united elements which long had been severed—the breadth of worldly culture, and the intensity of burning zeal. Before his light the light of paganism was to pale and die, yet, in the very act of death, to surrender up to Christianity all the truth it held, and all which made it great. In him the child-life was at length to yield a reasonable obedience to the dictates of a protective authority, and was to enter upon that long course of scholastic tuition which paused not till the dawn of manhood. We need not say that we speak of Aurelius Augustine—a name which shines amongst the Fathers as a sun amidst the stars.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE RECONCILIATION COMPLETED.

THE biography of Augustine has been so often told, that it is now familiar even to the unlearned. We know more of this man than we do of most of our contemporaries. It is not that we have a peculiarly minute acquaintance with the facts of his outer life; on the contrary, in proportion to the duration of that life, it has left behind it few striking incidents to arrest the eye of the mere historian. But the interest which we have in Augustine lies in the fact that his inner being is before us, that the doors of his very heart have been thrown open to admit the gaze of all eyes, and that we are allowed to see, not so much what he did, as what he was. It is not the hand of a stranger which has opened these doors, not the hand even of a friend or brother; it is Augustine himself who has revealed to posterity the secret places of his own soul. He has recorded stage by stage the progress of his spiritual history, from the darkness into the light, from the dawn into the day. And when we read this history, we lose the sense of distance; we forget that centuries roll between the reader and the writer. The life of Augustine never appears anything but modern, never suggests to us



the contrast between our days and the days of long ago ; it is spiritual, and therefore it is independent of time ; it deals not with the peculiarities of an individual man, but with the stages of being which belong to every life that has reached its natural ripeness, and therefore its interest is a human interest, co-extensive with the world, and coeval with the ages.

It is not, however, the biography of Augustine with which we are now specially concerned ; it is his place in history. His life forms one of the links in a chain, and we have to see which particular link it constitutes. He had a special work to do, and that was essentially a work of reconciliation. He was to bring back the harmony between the Church and the empire, to transport into the Christian life all worldly treasures which that life would consent to appropriate, and to bend the self-will of Christianity's childhood into a reasoning and reasonable obedience to the dictates of outward authority ; this was his peculiar mission, and we must endeavour to see how he was prepared for it. That preparation began with his very parentage ; here there was already foreshadowed a reunion of the Church and the empire. His father, Patricius, was a pagan of good family, and discharged the office of a magistrate at Tagaste, in Numidia ; he was thus, by religion, by blood, and by profession, allied to the empire, and, though apparently a man of no great personal ambition, his highest aspirations were awakened by the prospect of a brilliant life for his son in the service of his country. But if Augustine was thus

by the father's side united to the Roman state, he was in another direction associated with the purest type of Christianity. His mother, Monnica, was a Christian, and that not merely by profession, but by life and practice. In her the spirit of the religion dwelt in much of its early beauty. She lived in the world, and remained unspotted by the world, mingled with pagan associations, and retained her light undimmed. She seems not to have argued for Christianity by any other argument than that of a helpful, unselfish life. Yet we are convinced, that to the young Augustine this influence, at once so silent and so beneficent, must have furnished a stronger apology for Christianity than he could meet with in the written defences of Quadratus, and Aristides, and Justin. He found here something more than a defence of the Christian religion; he beheld a living representation of it, and at an age when he could not be impressed by its truth, he was attracted and riveted by its light. That was what Monnica did for Augustine. She inspired him with the belief that goodness was beautiful. He had through life many other preceptors—preceptors in philosophy, in æsthetics, in theology; but all these only built the superstructure, Monnica laid the foundation. That which ultimately led Augustine to the Christian faith was the sense of his own depravity, and that which awakened the sense of depravity was the vision of a pure life which was impressed upon his youthful soul; this work belongs to Monnica.

As yet, however, Augustine had nothing more than an ideal of goodness; he does not seem at this stage

to have struggled much after its realization. Indeed, the father's influence seems to have been more powerful over his actions than that of the mother. Monnica filled his heart with a sense of great possibilities, but Patricius chained down his hand to the pursuits and aims of the common world. And Augustine himself had clearly two sides to his nature; the paternal and the maternal life were both represented here. There was something in him which pointed to Christianity, and there was something which soared no higher than the heights of paganism; and for the present the pagan element prevailed. Attracted by the sensuous glories of the empire, the youth bent his steps to Carthage, with a view to prosecute his training for a participation in these glories. Carthage was then one of the greatest cities in the world; it was second to Rome in importance, and second to none in profligacy. There the empire was represented in its highest splendour, and at the same time in its utmost repulsiveness. The pagan religion was dead, but nothing had taken its place. Christianity had done little for the world since the days of Constantine, and that little had been lost in the apostasy of Julian. But if paganism was dead as a religion, it survived as a life; the external was still the object of practical worship, and men abandoned themselves to the pursuit of material pleasures with far more ardour than they had ever devoted themselves to the service of material gods. Augustine became a true child of the empire. He lost sight of the pure ideal which had brightened his opening years, and, attaching himself to the Epicurean

crowd, he limited his hopes and aims to the delights of the passing hour. No doubt unconsciously to himself, he was even now preparing for his mission. He who would be a reconciler of opposing extremes, must be able to say that he has touched the confines of both ; a one-sided experience puts mediation out of the question. Augustine was to bring back the mutual goodwill of the Church and the world, but before he could do so he must know the Church, and he must know the world. He must discover what was fit to be transported from the one into the other, and he could only discover it by living deeply in the experience of both. At present he was weighing in the balance the sensuous glories of the empire, and the experiment would not be a waste of labour if it should result in finding them wanting.

That result, indeed, was not far off. The ideal life was not dead in Augustine, it was only slumbering. The engrossments of material realities had vanquished for the time his spiritual aspirations, but a nature like his is ever subject to reactions. What Augustine was really seeking was not pleasure, but happiness ; the former is a fugitive impression, the latter an abiding state. What he wanted above all other things was something to rest upon, and this he did not find in the delights of Carthage ; these required unrest in him who would enjoy them. And so the ideal life woke once more, and the maternal struggled with the paternal influence. It was, indeed, a struggle ; his sentiments pointed one way, and the strength of long habit held him in the other ; he felt

powerless to decide the conflict between them. Then for the first time in his life he began to speculate, to ask himself the reason of this inward strife, and in the very act of doing so he was raised above the Epicurean level. Whence this antagonism in his nature? whence this contest between the spirit and the flesh? Was it something for which he was himself responsible? He felt himself too insignificant to have kindled so great a fire. Was it the work of a benevolent being? Why, then, should the evil principle have possession of the field? Or was it the work of a being who was himself evil? Why, then, should he allow good to exercise any dominion at all? Was it not clear that the Manichæans must be right—that there must be two rulers of the universe, one good and the other evil? That was the conclusion at which Augustine arrived, a conclusion which Parsism had reached long ago; and here he rested, or rather found another form of unrest, for a period of ten years. It was not possible that he should repose here. The Manichæan theory did not solve the difficulty; it only carried it a stage farther back—nay, in one sense it exaggerated it, for it made the dualism of the heart a dualism of the universe.

And so at length there came to Augustine that which at some time comes to most of us,—a period, we shall not say of intellectual darkness, but of intellectual voidness, when the old belief had passed away, and left no new faith to fill the blank. His was not a mind which must have a theory at any cost; it must be satisfied in its theory. It was in search of truth, but it was content to wait for truth; it preferred a



state of negation to a rash and precipitate affirmation. Manichæanism had failed to meet its requirements ; it knew not as yet of any form of belief which would prove more successful. But it did not on that account hang on to the old. It was not compelled to choose between rival systems ; its choice lay between a system which it had found to be inadequate, and the dismissal for the present of any definite creed whatsoever. Without hesitation, Augustine made his choice, and passed from a belief which was delusive into an unbelief which at least was honest. It was, indeed, unbelief rather than disbelief ; his was a scepticism of the nobler sort. He did not say that truth was not to be found ; he contented himself with saying that he had not found it. He did not set himself in antagonism to philosophic speculation ; he simply asserted that he had yet to prove its value. This negative attitude was a far higher cast of mind than that Epicurean indifference which marked the outset of his career,—far higher even than that reckless daring which, in the poverty of his historical know-ledge, had prompted him to adopt a Manichæan theory of the universe. His doubt was born of reverence ; and if it led him no nearer to a permanent resting-place than the creed which he had abandoned, it at least was more consistent with that native humility of soul which had made him essentially a seeker after truth.

Augustine's mind was now unbiassed, and in this state he prepared to enter systematically upon that study of philosophy which he had attempted to approach precipitately. He showed wisdom in selecting

for his special consideration the philosophy of Plato, because this was of all other systems that most allied to his own nature. Here he found much for which he had been craving. He found a belief which was peculiarly adapted to bring calmness to a restless mind—the belief in a universe which was filled with the divine presence. He found, at the same time, something which at first sight might appear to be inconsistent with this view—an intense perception of the prevalence of evil. Augustine had been drawn to Manichæanism because he had discovered there a deep sense of human corruption, and he was now drawn to Platonism by the discovery of a conviction not less strong. The Platonist, like the Manichæan, looked upon evil as incapable of separation from forms of material life, and declared it to be the duty of the soul to mortify and crucify the temporal form. It was an error, but it was an error which sprang from the deep conviction that sin had a tangible hold of the world, and therefore it could not do otherwise than exert a powerful fascination over one whose mind had long been conscious of the strength of moral corruption.

It was Platonism which first introduced Augustine to the philosophic beauties of the Christian religion. He had seen its practical beauties in the life of his mother Monnica ; but he probably had hitherto regarded it intellectually with that imperial contempt which, since the days of Constantine, the Roman world had evinced towards it. In the study of Platonism, that prejudice was dispelled. He was arrested by the striking similarity which the Scrip-

tures bore to the best points of the Platonic philosophy; and he awoke to the consciousness that Christianity was a grand religion, in unison with the highest instincts of human nature, and in harmony with the deepest wisdom which has emanated from the heart of man. He did not yet regard it as itself the ultimate truth,—that place he had assigned to the system of Plato,—yet he looked upon it already as the road to ultimate truth. He began to read the Scriptures as a training for the Platonic philosophy, and was delighted to discover the beautiful harmonies of thought which ever and anon united the meditations of the Greek and of the Jew. And as the Old Testament had clearly the priority in time, there must even now have dawned upon the mind of Augustine the impression that, after all, Christianity might be the whole, and Platonism only the part,—Christianity the sun, and Platonism merely the satellite. Such an impression would already be a step over the boundary-line which divided the speculations of heathendom from the light which led to a clearer day.

A few steps more, and the full light burst upon him. He had been studying the Scriptures with a view to discover the analogies of Christianity and Platonism; he was suddenly arrested by a startling difference. Plato had told him that the objects of sense were the source of all evil, and that the only rest which man could find was the crucifixion of sensuous impressions. Here was a religion whose central doctrine was the assertion of an exactly opposite creed; which began by proclaiming God to be the creator of matter, and culminated by announcing

the incarnation of God in a material form ; which held out the prospect of a resurrection of the flesh as well as of the spirit, and declared it to be the duty of man, not to emancipate himself from the body, but to keep the body pure. And as Augustine advanced in his investigation, he found that Christianity, in denying the Platonic theory of sin, had done so only to deepen the sense of sin's depravity. It had taken it away from matter, but where had it placed it ? In a more radical source than any material object—in the human will itself. It was here that the light broke on Augustine ; a light that never wavered, never paled. For the first time he awoke to the conviction that the source of unrest was the search for rest in the gratification of self-will. For the first time there dawned the consciousness of a life which is found by losing it ; of a joy which comes by forgetting to seek for it. For the first time he realized, that if the individual would be happy, he must lower his estimate of individual pleasures ; must merge his personal interests in those of the human brotherhood, and those of the human brotherhood in the light of the life of God. And then from this thought there rose another, which more than all beside dominated the heart of Augustine. If sin consisted in the exercise of self-will, it could never be crucified by an act of the self-life ; that would be the conquest of evil by evil. The soul must be liberated from its own liberty, must be captivated by an influence stronger than its own motives. It could not find God by searching for Him ; it must find Him by His search for it. It must be born into a new life, translated into a purer

atmosphere, lifted into a rest undiscovered and undiscoverable by human efforts. Its chords must be made to vibrate with heavenly music; but the power which swept the strings must be the breath of the Divine Spirit,—God Himself must wake it into melody. Augustine believed that to him personally this experience had come. The moment he relinquished his self-efforts, he felt himself to be an instrument in the hands of another. There came over his spirit a great calm, there fell upon his life a profound peace. He seemed to have his being in a new world, to have risen from the grave of his former self, and to be living a life which was in him but not of him, possessed by his soul, yet issuing from another heart. Could this be anything less than the breath of God's Spirit,—was it not 'Christ in him the hope of glory'? That was the question which Augustine asked himself, and never for a moment did he waver in the answer. He had received a call from heaven—a call not alone to the Christian life, but to the Christian ministry. There had come to him a command which he could not disobey. Like Abraham of old, he had been summoned to leave the associations of his childhood and of his youth, to give up those objects which had constituted his earliest pleasures, and to enter into a land full of promise, indeed, but still outwardly strange to him. It had been revealed to him that his life had a great purpose to fulfil, a mission to perform, a work to do. A new field burst upon his vision—a field running into desolation, which he was called to cultivate. He was commissioned to sow there the seeds of a fresh life, and to prepare the



waste places for yielding a precious harvest ; and the moment he recognised his destiny, ' old things passed away, and all things to him became new.'

Here, then, was a very remarkable circumstance. A child of the empire, born in its days of deepest degeneracy, educated amidst its corruptions, trained in its ideal of material greatness, launched in early youth into the heart of its sensuous pleasures, engrossed in maturer years with the study of its efforts to find the road to truth, had voluntarily, deliberately, by an act of determinate choice and judgment, come to the Christian religion as the ultimate source of light. He had come, not, like Constantine, through political or worldly motives ; he had been attracted by Christianity itself, and not by anything which Christianity could bring him. This was a real conquest, the most tangible triumph which Christ's religion had achieved since the days of its missionary glory ; a triumph which went farther to reconcile the Church and the empire than all the councils presided over by imperial power. It is not surprising that Church and State alike should have combined to do him honour. The Church was naturally proud of its new convert ; proud of his high attainments, of his vast experience, above all of that choice by which he had selected the religion of Christ out of all other forms of faith. The State recognised in Augustine an instrument peculiarly adapted for advancing the authority of the empire over the child-life of Christianity. Here was a man who, as the result of a long and earnest trial, had come to the conclusion that self-will was pernicious. Here was a man who had been led step by step to the con-

viction that freedom in the popular sense of that word should not be sought for and ought not to be desired, that the highest liberty of an intelligent being was voluntary obedience to a standard higher than his own, and that the rational submission to an approved authority was at once the duty and the privilege of a human soul. The empire perceived that a man holding such views would be quite willing to see them embodied in an outward form ; let him once be persuaded that the Roman state was intended to represent the theocracy, and he would thenceforth make it his aim and endeavour to bend Christianity's child-life into harmony with the imperial will. Accordingly, from these different motives, Church and State agreed to follow one course towards Augustine—to look upon him with reverence, and to load him with benefits. From the moment of his baptism his rise was rapid. Within a few years after his conversion to Christianity, he was elevated to the bishopric of Hippo ; within a few years more he may be said to have reached the position of Bishop of the West. That position was secured to him by no mere ecclesiastical association ; was accorded to him, not as a leader of the hierarchy, but as a guide of the Christian intellect ; it was the force of his mind alone which lent force to his authority. The child-life of Christianity seems from the outset to have accepted this man as its first schoolmaster, to have recognised in him the inaugurator of a new life and the educator of a higher stage of mental development.

Nor was the empire on its side disappointed with the choice it had made ; Augustine was prepared with

his whole heart to carry out its purpose. He was convinced that submission to an authority which should be deemed divinely established would in the end be far more beneficial to the young life of the Church than the guidance of its own impulses and the following of its own arbitrary caprices. He considered its self-will to be at once the barrier to its progress and the source of its corruption, and he determined to crush that self-will wherever he discovered its manifestation. There were at this period two such outbursts of the child-life of Christianity ; they are known by the names of Donatism and Pelagianism. The Donatist wanted ecclesiastical freedom ; his position was analogous to that of the presbyters who strove with Cyprian. The Pelagian desired theological freedom ; he believed the doctrine of human corruption to be exaggerated, and claimed for human nature the power both to think and to act independently. But from our point of view these two are one ; they are the remains of the child-life, the last manifestations of the age of self-will. It is not surprising that, in the suppression of this reaction against authority, the State should have supported Augustine ; but it is somewhat surprising that the general mind of the Church itself should have been quite willing to combine with the schoolmaster in eradicating its primitive instincts. We might have expected that Pelagius and Donatus would, through the semblance which their cause bore to the cause of freedom, have presented a much more formidable opposition to Augustine and to the empire. At one time, indeed, it appeared as if the mind of Christendom would side with Pelagius ; the synods of Jerusalem

and Diospolis were decidedly favourable to him. But there followed an immediate revulsion of feeling, which cannot be altogether explained by the personal influence of Augustine. If we are not greatly mistaken, the scale of public sentiment was in great measure turned by an external circumstance, which imparted to the question a wholly new aspect.

Since the days of Bishop Stephen, the see of Rome appears to have left the Church unmolested ; at this critical moment it once more renewed its efforts after supremacy. The chair was filled by Zosimus, a man who possessed all the ambition of Stephen without his talents. He seems to have thought the occasion favourable for strengthening his own hands, and he resolved to bear the appearance of a champion of liberty by supporting the self-will of the Church against the authority of the empire. What he really did was to unite Church and State more closely, and to lower the influence of his own position. The child-life of Christianity was confronted by two authorities instead of one. On the one side was an empire full-grown, desirous to take the Church under its tutelage, exacting obedience, but promising protection in return. On the other was an empire in embryo, an incipient power, formidable as yet rather by what it foreshadowed than by what it was, aspiring to an absolute and unconditional dominion over the heart of Christianity. On the one side was a power ruling by physical strength, and enforcing its decrees by the influence of a temporal authority. On the other was an agency which aimed at a more subtle dominion, which sought to rule the Christian world by

restraining the fountains of Christian thought and feeling. On the one side was Rome the secular, with its armies and its eagles, and its long array of historical triumphs. On the other was Rome the sacred, aspiring in due season to take the place of the secular, and designing, without armies or eagles or any temporal influences whatever, to lay the physical force of Europe prostrate at its feet. And between these two the Christianity of that period hesitated not a moment. The child-life of the Christian Church saw before it two powers,—one great, and the other becoming great,—and it feared that which was rising more than that which had risen. The moment Pelagianism became associated with sacred Rome, the Church and the empire drew close together. The moment the Roman bishop attempted to assert authority, the State appeared as the champion of Protestantism, and attracted to itself the friends of liberty. It was indeed an appearance rather than a reality. Had Zosimus not interfered, the attitude of the empire might have suggested to the heart of Christendom, not Protestantism, but despotism ; but men are ever ruled by association, and association is often determined by the events of the passing hour. It was so at this moment of Christianity's history. Pelagianism would to many minds have suggested the notion of a pristine freedom which the Church was struggling to recall ; but when sacred Rome stepped into the arena to propagate that Pelagianism by the strength of its own authority, it lost its association with liberty, and became suggestive of oppression and bondage. The light of freedom seemed to transfer itself to the empire, and Augustine, as



the instrument of that empire, appeared to be the custodier of the rights of Christendom. The Church and the State were brought nearer to one another than they had been since the days of Constantine, and a bond of relationship was established between them which was at once more inward and more permanent than that which had been constituted by the edict of Milan. In this attitude of antagonism between sacred and secular Rome, was there not also an adumbration of that great European struggle, when the empire of the State and the empire of the Church were to strive for the right of pre-eminence, and when Germany was to complete that conflict which the last days of the Roman world had begun?

## CHAPTER XVII.

### CLOSE OF THE CHILD-LIFE.

WE have now arrived at that period when the spirit of Christianity had reached the goal towards which it had long been tending. We have seen how that spirit, beginning with antagonism to the world, and subsiding afterwards into mere indifference, had ultimately come to be impressed with the ideal of worldly glory. We have seen how by stages, insensible at first to itself, it had been drawing ever nearer to the standard of imperial greatness, approximating ever more closely to the imitation of a temporal dominion. We have seen how the course of events conspired to realize this aspiration, how the empire itself was gradually prepared for its accomplishment, and how each successive age contributed more and more to lessen the distance between the Church and the State,—all which clearly demonstrates that their union was no accident, but only the latest link in a great chain of development. We have now seen the consummation of that union. The child-life of Christianity had at last relinquished its independent existence, and had placed itself under the tuition of the world. It had taken up its home in the region

of temporal things, in order that, by studying their laws, it might rise to temporal greatness. It saw before it a new destiny, a destiny of external power and worldly dominion; and in preparation for that destiny it had entered into the world's school, to study its language, and to learn its modes of thought. This was the true beginning of the scholastic age. With what feelings shall we contemplate the transition? Shall we consider it a progress or a retrogression? a loss or a gain? Upon the whole, we are disposed to regard it in the same light as we regard all such transitions in the individual life. When we see the child losing its childhood, we have some pain, but more satisfaction; pain for the breaking of an old association, satisfaction in the forming of a new.

There is no gain which is not purchased by some loss; life loses much of its pristine beauty in the very act of ripening into usefulness, but the fruit is higher than the primitive bloom. Christianity was now for the first time on the road to becoming a power in the world. That in the process it became also a power of the world is to be lamented; but the fact that the period which was opening upon it was not to be one of unclouded splendour, should not blind us to the truth that it was a period of real advancement. Casting back our eye over the centuries through which we have travelled, there is one thing which must strike us very powerfully, and that is, how little Christianity has hitherto done for the world as a world. We have seen it, indeed, advancing on its march by strides, making year by

year a multitude of converts, and at last becoming an object of political anxiety even to the Roman Empire. But all these conquests had as yet tended rather to advance Christianity than to advance the world. Its converts seemed to think that their change of heart demanded a change of occupation. It was no uncommon thing for a man of wealth who had embraced the religion of Christ, to inaugurate his new life by abandoning his worldly substance. Augustine himself began by dividing his goods among the poor. If in this there was much that was unselfish, there was much that was erroneous too; it proceeded upon the notion of an antagonism between the religious and the practical life. And this was the more to be regretted, because, as we have seen, where Christianity did identify itself with earthly pursuits and callings, it uniformly tended to elevate and ennoble them. We hear Paul commending above all other Christians the servants of Nero's household. We have seen, at a later period, the servants of Valerian's household combining the duties of the empire with the aims of the Christian. We have remarked how the Roman legions themselves were strengthened by the followers of Christ. But it was not every one who was able conscientiously to reconcile these things. There were many whose opposition to paganism extended to all the modes of life and all the avocations of life which were common among the pagans, and who would have deemed it a compromise with idolatry to take part in any duties connected with the empire. The result was, that

Christianity had been as yet defrauded of its due. It was pre-eminently designed to be a religion for the world; hitherto its chief province had been closed against it. The training of Christianity to be a world-power was a step in the direction of remedy; and if that training resulted in too much worldliness, it was only the reaction from an equally great abuse on the other side. The entrance, therefore, of the child-life into the world's school was, upon the whole, a matter of congratulation. It opened up new avenues of usefulness; it revealed fresh sources of power; it suggested to the religion itself possibilities of greatness which had hitherto been latent; and it heightened its sense of fellowship with God, by increasing its conviction of brotherhood with man.

There were two worldly impulses with which the Christianity of the future was to be strongly associated—the love of beauty and the love of freedom. We have seen that originally the spirit of Christianity had little sympathy with human art. Had there existed a celebrated painter in the early part of the second century, he would, in the absence of any authentic likeness of Christ, have depicted Him, not as a model of perfect symmetry, but as afflicted with physical deformity; so complete has been the reversal of the primitive and the mediæval standpoint. It has been held that this association of Christ with an ignoble form took its rise from an erroneous interpretation of Isaiah liii. 2; the truth is, it was the opposition to pagan art which prompted the interpretation. That which Gibbon calls the



‘intolerant and inflexible zeal’ of the first Christians, extended not merely to the revolt from pagan worship, but to the repudiation of pagan culture. The delineation of beautiful forms was a province of that culture, and therefore the beauty of form suffered vicariously in the reproach of paganism. It was not that the spirit of Christianity had set itself in antagonism to material loveliness in the abstract ; on the contrary, all its hopes were built upon a future kingdom which should realize the conception of absolute physical beauty. But that which it longed to behold in the future it could not bear to accept from the present, especially when that present was under the sway of an unsympathetic empire and a heathen religion, and therefore it closed its eyes to everything which imperial Rome had devised to gratify the thirst for the beautiful. Yet, just in proportion as Christianity drew near to the empire, it lost its opposition to the artistic and the æsthetic. As private houses gave place to consecrated buildings, as simple praise and prayer were elaborated into a ceremonious ritual, the spirit of Christianity found itself inevitably drawn into contact with the associations it had wished to repel. The multiplication of rites, unfavourable as it was to the spiritual life, undoubtedly contributed somewhat to the æsthetic culture of the religion, and tended to make the unseen and eternal less antagonistic to the seen and temporal. But it was after the consummation of the union between Church and State that the influence of art began fully to exert its sway. We shall see in succeeding periods how powerful this influence

proved. We shall see how it progressively manifested itself in the history of the Christian Church, from the days when images were set up in the sacred edifice, to the days when these images glowed on the canvas of an Angelo and a Raphael. We shall see how art itself became a temple of Christian worship, a shrine to which the spirit of Christianity repaired when it could no longer find a place of rest in the lives of individual men. The aspirations of humanity expressed themselves on the canvas when they had ceased to express themselves in the life, and the religion of Christ received from the beautiful in art that tribute it had lost by the fading of the beautiful in soul.

The second of these worldly impulses with which the Christianity of the future was to associate itself was the love of freedom. It was essentially the religion of freedom; it professed to emancipate the human spirit. Nor must we limit this claim to the emancipation from spiritual bondage; the work begins, but does not end here. It is the express doctrine of Christ's religion that every kind of liberty flows from spiritual freedom. 'If the truth shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.' Yet, during the early centuries, Christianity did not aim at establishing this connection between inward and outward liberty; it sought to free the soul from its own inherent corruptions, and it left the external liberation to be wrought out by time. The religion of Christ found slavery recognised in the world as a legal practice. In principle it was in direct antagonism to such an institution, for it was founded on human

brotherhood, and therefore it presupposed the individual rights of every man. But it did not on that account attack slavery as an institution; its course was slower, but surer. Its aim was to awaken the sense of brotherhood, to inspire the breast of each man with the enthusiasm of humanity, the conviction that every human being was his neighbour. It judged, and rightly judged, that if the warmth of brotherhood were once created, it would speedily melt the chains of slavery and establish universal freedom. But the heat had first to be generated; the melting was a slower process than the breaking of the chains. Before Christianity could even begin its work of outward emancipation, it had to come into contact with the world with the world's own consent; and we have seen that more than three centuries had to pass ere this voluntary contact was effected. But from this time the course of Christ's religion was side by side with the march of freedom. From the days of Augustine to our own days, the history of Christendom has been the history of the progress of human liberty. It is not correct to represent the birth of this liberty as an event accomplished at the Reformation. Protestantism did, indeed, contribute greatly to further its growth and increase its strength, but its life had dawned long before. The annals of mediæval Europe exhibit, amidst a mass of individual corruptions, a progress of generic freedom. The Papacy, indeed, aimed at an absolute despotism, but for this very reason it was a barrier to the absolute despotism of every secular power. Moreover, as a modern historian has remarked, the

hierarchy had itself a republican aspect. Here was a region in which the influence of caste was suspended, in which personal merit was allowed its due sway, and in which, from the meanest poverty and from the lowliest circumstances, a man might, by the force of mental power, rise to a pinnacle of greatness above even that of kings. The existence of such a sphere in the midst of the secular world could not fail to lessen in that world itself the distance between the high-born and the lowly; and therefore we are not surprised to find that, long before the Protestant reaction had asserted the claims of individual judgment, the principle of serfdom had begun to decline, and the rights of men had made themselves felt and known.

We repeat, then, that the scholastic period upon which Christianity was entering was the road to a substantial gain. But we have said that it also involved a present loss, and this loss was nothing less than the death of the child-life itself. The entrance of Christianity into the world's school was the passing away of its childhood. It attained to nobler stages of being, it reached more lofty heights of liberty, but it never again became the Christianity of the first centuries. The change might be described as the transition from spontaneity into self-consciousness. The fact that such a transition had taken place was first manifested to the heart of Christendom by the experience of a very painful feeling—disenchantment. The followers of Christ's religion had looked forward to this hour with eager expectancy. They had contemplated the time when they should be



recognised by the world as a season of crowning glory; some of them had even expected to find in it the realization of the millennial age. It came, and the illusion vanished; the child-life reached the goal of its dreams, and died in the very act of reaching it. Christianity awoke into the consciousness that its heart could not be filled by any worldly possession, and that no merely temporal kingdom could realize its ideal of millennial splendour. As years rolled on it had new dreams of greatness, but this particular dream was never revived; its race of worldly ambition was indeed only beginning, but at no period of its future history did it mistake the goal of worldly ambition for the advent of the kingdom of God. By its entrance into the empire's school, it was effectually disenchanted. In the aspect of that empire there was, indeed, much to disenchant. So far from exhibiting a visible kingdom of God, it did not even any longer exhibit a stable kingdom of man. East and West alike were shaking to their foundation. Alaric the Goth had carried his victorious arms into Thrace, Thessaly, Macedon, and Illyria; Athens had been saved by a tribute, and Constantinople had trembled for its safety. Gaul had been the next battle-field, and though preserved for a time by the military talents of Stilicho, it had been at the expense of a long and bloody conflict. Britain had been abandoned by the imperial legions, and the conquests of Cæsar relinquished more hastily than they had been won. Then Italy itself had felt the stroke of the barbarians. Rome, thrice besieged, had at last been entered in triumph, and for six days the great city



had been a scene of desolation and horror. Death had arrested the career of Alaric, and there had followed a gleam of sunshine. But now there was coming from the North a host more formidable still. The Vandals were pressing upon those parts of the Roman world which the Goths had spared, and the region of North Africa was the scene of their depredations. In that region dwelt Augustine, now an aged man, but still the representative of the Christianity of his day. After his long spiritual struggles he had hoped to find outward repose, and to close his eyes in peace, resting on the empire's protective bosom. It was a delusive hope, and bitterly was it disappointed; the empire could not even protect itself. The barbarians were approaching the walls of Hippo, the seat of his own bishopric. The minds of men were filled with consternation, and the ruin seemed inevitable of all that was good and great. It was at this stage that Augustine sat down to write his last and greatest work, *The City of God*. It has much to interest the theologian, but to us it has an interest apart from theology; it expressed the disenchantment of the Christian mind. The city of God was no longer contemplated as a place of earthly abode, no longer as the metropolis of a kingdom made with hands; it was invisible in time, and eternal in the heavens. From the eyes of the old man were fading all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. The Vandals were battering at his gates, and every stroke was a death-knell. The Roman power was hastening to its close, and in beholding the evanescence of all material greatness, the hearts of men

were impressed with these words, which, in kindred circumstances, an ancient writer had penned : ‘ Here we have no continuing city.’ Augustine had survived his hope of Christianity’s secular glory ; he sought now only preservation from captivity. He prayed for death or deliverance, and he received death. He died in the midst of the storm, while the result of the siege was still undetermined. His last look at the world was one of sadness ; his work had been seemingly all in vain. He had tried to plant the seeds of Christian truth in an earthly soil, to unite the things that were temporal with the things that were eternal, and he had found that no earthly soil would allow the heavenly seed to grow. It appeared to him that henceforth the spirit of Christianity must wander apart from the world, separated from all mundane objects, to find its hope of rest only in the destruction of the finite. With these melancholy forebodings in his soul, the greatest of the Fathers passed away.

Was, then, the aspect of events so worthy of despair ? Was there no quarter to which the world could look for a perpetuation of its religious progress ? There was one such direction, and that the most unlikely of all ; hope was to come from the barbarians themselves. The Roman, indeed, was falling, but in the horde of Goths and Vandals the Teuton was rising, and the Teuton was to constitute the life of modern civilisation. Nay, in the very act of conquest, the barbarians of the North were themselves to be conquered by the culture of the West. They brought into the Roman world a Christianity rough, rugged, stern ; they found in it a Christianity weak,

effeminate, sensuous; but in the very process of rooting it out they were softened by its contact. The Teutonic mind had already received the masculine element of European life; it had yet to receive its feminine element. It had already the strength and the bravery, the boldness to plan and the power to execute, the thirst for freedom and the capacity for being free. But it wanted still that which makes life beautiful as well as strong—the love of art, the love of poetry, the love of culture, the love of loveliness itself. And it was to find it here, in this fabric of dissolving Roman greatness. The life of the empire was passing away, but it was to pass not into nothingness, only into other forms of existence. The one was to become the many; the river was to be parted into myriad streams. These northern tribes themselves were to catch the glow of Western civilisation, and to bear its scattered rays into the lands they were to conquer far away—the Saxons into Britain, the Franks into Gaul, the Huns and Goths and Vandals into the future principalities of Germany. Thus, from elements in themselves distinct, was to spring the life of civilised Europe. The Reformation was to join with the renaissance, freedom with culture, strength with gentleness. The bald North was to clothe itself in the luxuriance of the sunny South; the stern Teuton was to soften beneath the influence of the classic beam; and in the union of those forces, which had been long so dissimilar and so discordant, the world was at length to present a soil prepared for the reception of the precious seed.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEW PERIOD.

WE have said that the prospect presented to Christianity by the fall of the Western Empire was not one of utter despair; that amidst all the ruin of that great catastrophe, a discerning eye might easily recognise the elements of a future and a more glorious reconstruction. Yet it must be confessed that to an undiscerning eye the ruin might well have seemed immense and irremediable. As the great centre of political and social unity disappears from view, the historian loses for a moment all sight of land. During the first four centuries his gaze has rested where the gaze of Christendom rested; on the heights of the imperial city, as long as these have continued visible, he has been in possession of a prominent landmark by which to direct the course of his voyage, and in the light of that landmark he has seen all things clear. But as imperial Rome sinks below the horizon, he has no longer an object by which to steer; there gathers before his sight what seems to be a great waste of waters, fathomless, boundless, fruitful in the storms of anarchy, and leading to no country where man can dwell. And what the historian of this age experiences in tracing

the development of Christianity, was experienced by Christianity itself in realizing that development. It appeared for the moment as if an arrest had been put to its progress, as if a light had been extinguished to conceal the course on which it journeyed. Nor was it a mere appearance ; the fall of Rome was for the time a real disadvantage, and a substantial loss. Let us consider what was implied in that catastrophe.

We remember the belief of ancient mythology, that the winds were in calm weather all imprisoned in a single cave, until the hand of a potent magician broke their fetters, and sent them forth to wander over the world. In the dissolution of the Roman Empire we see something very like this exhibited in actual history. That empire had been the cave of all the winds ; the centre which united the fierce passions of men ; the unity which embraced the diverse nations of the earth, and presented a common meeting-place for all lands and all minds. The empire fell, the walls of the prison-house were broken, and the captive nations ran free. It is true that even in their flight they could not entirely escape the culture of the fallen metropolis. It was inevitable that they should bear along with them not only the flowers of a past, but the seeds of a future civilisation ; for it was impossible that they could have passed through such centuries of development without gathering some materials which yet might issue in a harvest. Nevertheless, the development which these conquered nations had acquired under the Roman sway was far more inconsiderable than one would naturally have supposed. Indeed, it may be



affirmed, that whatever culture they did possess was owing rather to their natural receptivity, than to any efforts which the mistress of the world had made in their behalf. The idea of Roman greatness was not the exertion of moral influence, nor yet the pride of being the centre of an intellectual life; it was simply the wielding of an external power. This was the highest unity to which the empire aspired. To attain such a unity, it had only to bind the fetters and erect the walls of the dungeon; when it had restrained the nations within its own boundaries, its ambition desired no more. The result was what might have been expected. These captive states were part of the Roman power, but not an essential part of the Roman life. They never lost their national characteristics, never laid aside their individual peculiarities; they were simply bound with a chain, and when that chain was withdrawn they rushed back into their former selves. In the temporary rebound from imperial dominion, they fell away even from those benefits of culture which, under the empire, they had accidentally acquired; and it seemed for a time as if they would collapse once more into the mists of primitive barbarism, and into the horrors of lawless anarchy. The Western world was in the position of an uneducated and undisciplined household which had lost its head. Unfit to rule itself, there was yet no power left to rule it. The authority which had restrained its impulses was removed; and as nothing had been done to eradicate these impulses themselves, there was danger of an untutored society becoming a law to itself.

Here, then, there was presented to the spirit of Christianity a new and hitherto unheard of barrier. Great as had been its difficulties in the past, there had yet been one circumstance which had facilitated its progress. We have already seen that the child-life of Christianity was passed amidst a world intellectually in advance of itself. Its path lay through the palmiest days of the classic age. At the period of its birth, Rome had reached the climax of all its glories, literary, political, and military. The strifes and divisions which weakened it as a republic had been lulled to rest by its erection into an empire, and the will of a single potentate imposed upon the world the necessity of at least an external peace. In this season of outward repose the arts of culture and of civilisation had awakened into new strength, and assumed a new dominion. Poetry and philosophy had revived from a long sleep, and the minds of the thoughtful everywhere had been stimulated afresh into the search for truth, and the study of the mystery of being. It was in this intellectual soil that the first Christian seed was sown; and although there were many and great influences contributing to retard its growth, the mental energy which surrounded it was undoubtedly a source of nourishment. But when the child-life of Christianity had passed away, and when the school-life was about to begin, there had come a change over the aspect of affairs. The classic age had long departed; poetry had lost its fervour; philosophy had declined in its strength; the search for truth had ceased to be the animating motive of mankind.

The outward bond of unity, which had secured the semblance of concord among the nations, had been snapped by the hands of the barbarians. In the East, indeed, there lingered the appearance of an absolute authority, but it was only the echo of a voice which had ceased to be. In the West there was not even the appearance of a guiding hand; Rome as a secular dominion was no more, and its children were left to carve their own path through the world. It was not difficult to foretell what such a path must be; it must be one of united error and of mutual strife, of disorder and of anarchy, of the preference of individual aims to the purposes of universal good. And it was through this dislocated society that Christianity's school-life was to pass. It was through nations without a head, through tribes without culture, through minds without sympathy, that it was now to wend its way. It was to speak to regions that had nothing in common with it, to enter into contact with lives in utter dissonance with its own. It was a task of tremendous responsibility, and a work of gigantic difficulty.

In meeting these difficulties, Christianity required all its force, and on this account there opens another characteristic, distinguishing the period which is coming from the period which is past. In the early centuries of the Christian Church, the spirit of the religion generally found its full expression in the acts of a single life. We have seen how the features of each age have been hitherto exhibited in one representative countenance, how each successive stage of Christian experience has uttered itself in the voice

of some distinguished individual man. The first age perhaps expressed itself in James, the second in Peter, the third in Paul, and the fourth in the Roman Clement. The first half of the second century incarnated itself in the life of Justin Martyr, and the second revealed its spirit in the pre-eminence of Irenæus of Lyons. The moral struggles of the child-life were concentrated in Tertullian, and the last rays of the Christian renaissance beamed out in the soul of Origen. The age of expediency appeared in Eusebius of Cæsarea, and the subjugation of the self-will of childhood was portrayed in the history of Augustine. Thus far there had been the man for every hour. But we are coming to a period when we must no longer look for such an arrangement. The spirit of Christianity must now diffuse itself over a wider area, must take in more regions at a sweep, must embrace more lives at a time. No longer must we expect to find a hero for every age, and a representative for every tendency. The energy of the Christian faith must extend itself, must give less to one and more to all. And that is the reason why the history of mediævalism is far less minute than the history of the early centuries; it is an exhibition of principles which express themselves on a large scale, and travel in a short time over much ground. Do we not see the same tendency exhibited in the course of individual life? The development of childhood may be marked by the acts of every day and year, and nothing could be more instructive to the philosopher than a diary of childish experiences. But when the child-life is gone, such a



diary would lose its value, for the distance between the milestones of progress widens with the duration of the journey. We shall not therefore be surprised to find that, in encountering the new obstacles which a new phase of society had presented, the spirit of Christianity availed itself of all the agencies at its command, and that instead of limiting its action to individual deeds and special historic incidents, it struggled to operate through widely diffused principles, pervading many minds and embracing many generations.

How, then, was Christianity to meet these obstacles? The Western world, which hitherto had been the most important world, was in want of a head. It was clear that, before Christianity could permeate this mass of disorganization, it must have an organization of its own. Secular Rome had up to this time been the focus of the nations; it was gone, and the nations had no focus. How was the void to be supplied? how was the loss to be compensated? Would it not be possible that the spirit of Christianity should itself become the centre of the world's unity? that instead of seeking to lean upon a secular support, it should itself become the support of all secular powers? Thus far it had been only one of the influences at work in the development of nations; might it not now bring the nations to contribute to its own development? Was it not prophesied that 'the kingdoms of this world were to become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ'? And if this were Christianity's destiny, was not the aspect of affairs in Europe the manifest opportunity of fulfilling it? Here was a family of nations



without parental guidance ; why should not the Church assume the attitude of fatherhood, and claim the household of secular power as a branch of the great family of Christian brotherhood ? Why should it not aspire to raise up the empire from its ashes, no longer in the form of a mere temporal dominion, but in the guise of a theocratic power, declaring not the pleasure of man, but the immutable will of God ?

Such we believe to be the origin of the Papal idea in the heart of the collective Church. We say the collective Church, because in the minds of isolated individuals that idea had existed long ago. Victor had cherished it, Stephen had cherished it, Zosimus had cherished it ; each successive bishop of Rome had progressively entertained it. Yet in this respect the Roman See was not in unison with the mind of the Church at large ; its attitude bore a strong resemblance to the efforts of private ambition. The Church had been willing to place itself implicitly under the sway of the Roman emperor ; it desired no other jurisdiction. But the fall of Rome altered in the West the spirit of its dream. That event deprived it at once of a ruler and of a refuge, and threw it back upon the strength of its own resources. In this moment of abandonment by outward aid, the spirit of Christianity began to awaken to the consciousness of its own power. For the first time the general mind of Christendom was stirred with the desire of beholding the religion of Christ invested with temporal dominion ; for the first time the private designs of the Roman bishops received support and encouragement from the current of public opinion. The

pressure of events seemed to have stepped in as the ally of hierarchical pretensions, and necessity conspired with individual ambition to hasten the hour of ecclesiastical monarchy. Nor was there anything unchristian in the thought that the Church of Christ should be represented by a visible head. It is absolutely necessary to every form of religion that it should centre in some point of outward unity ; in this respect the Papacy is not peculiar. An œcumenical council of the ancient Church derived all its force from the fact that it was a representative assembly, expressing in one concentrated utterance the voices of a multitude. The same may be said of every ecclesiastical convocation, whether episcopalian or presbyterian. What the Church wanted was as yet no more than a medium of representation, and a medium of representation is required by all churches, ancient and modern. The spirit of Christianity was doubtless even now contemplating monarchy, but it was monarchy after a representative type—after such a type as we see exhibited in the British constitution, the one chosen to declare the will of the many. This comparatively modest aim was indeed not permanent. There came a time, and that speedily, when the Church abandoned its idea of a representative king, for the conception of a sovereign whose will was absolute law ; but that time was not yet. Even Roman ambition was only in its morning, and the transition from a universal priesthood to an unbending temporal hierarchy was not to be accomplished by a sudden or violent change.

In the meantime, however, it was desirable that

the idea of monarchy thus generated should be kept alive in the Church. Christianity was entering upon its school-days ; that period in which the mind is so open to influences and impressions. It was surely of inestimable value, that from the very outset it should be trained in that thought of sovereignty to which its destiny pointed and to which its hopes aspired. Accordingly, the school was itself constructed after the model of an empire. The school was the monastery ; this was to be the training-place of the spirit of Christianity. Here it was to study the elements of its own nature ; here it was to gather strength for the burden and heat of the day. And here, too, it was to learn obedience to the rod of sovereign dominion. Every monastery was a little kingdom in itself ; whatever lawlessness might reign elsewhere, there were law and order here. It was presided over by a governor who was called an abbot. The abbot was to the monastery in particular what the Pope afterwards became to the Christian world at large—its ruler, director, controller. He held there a realm marked out and separated from all other provinces, exempt from all interferences except that Papal interference which ultimately admitted of no restriction. He was commissioned as it were to play the emperor on a small scale, was directed to provide and legislate for his little kingdom, and was commanded to insist upon that reverence which the sovereign receives from his subject. And the lessons taught in these monastic schools were admirably calculated to produce these ends. The monk was taught to recognise as the leading doctrine

of his practical creed, the paramount duty of obedience. He was taught to cultivate as the mainspring of his religious life, those virtues of the Sermon on the Mount which had hitherto failed to obtain their due recognition,—the poverty of spirit, the sense of personal nothingness, the meekness which retired into the background, the love of peace which made way for the claims of others, the hungering and the thirsting after righteousness which dimmed the eye to objects of outward ambition. It may be said, it has been said, that the exclusive contemplation of these gentler features of the Christian life had a strong tendency to encourage the spirit of political despotism. We might answer to this, that the brotherhood of man with man, which was involved in the monastic order, was well calculated to present a counteracting influence to such a spirit; but we have no wish to take refuge in such a plea. We freely admit that the teaching of the monastery pointed, and was designed to point, to the subjugation of the individual will. To say so is only to repeat in other words that the monastery was the school of Christianity. It is the first condition of school-life that it should be subject, and that it should realize its subjection; the exercise of individual will is the mark of the child, the bending of individual will is the preparation for the man. The entrance into its school-days was to Christianity the beginning of that process of bending which eventually enabled it to emerge into a higher independence, and the region of monastic life was the sphere in which it acquired those lessons of submission, which, under the guise of self-degradation,



fostered some of the brightest virtues to which the Christian religion can lay exclusive claim.

Such, then, is the spirit in which we intend to contemplate the life of the monastery. The subject is one of those vexed questions which have furnished a battle-ground for many ages and for many minds. In that hour when the Christian religion re-awakened after long centuries to a sense of its native liberty, we can hardly be surprised that it looked back to the thralldom of its school-days with an eye of unqualified aversion. Protestantism, in its moment of reaction, was ready to break altogether with the past, to regard with suspicion the writings of the early Fathers, and to condemn mediævalism simply because it was mediæval. With the advance of ages the bitterness of the controversy has been forgotten, and Protestantism has in many quarters veered round to the opposite extreme. Even in Germany, which was once the hotbed of the strife, we can mark the reconciliatory influence of a mind like Schleiermacher, and marvel at the almost regressive tendency of such a man as Hengstenberg. In literary circles there has been in this century a division of opinion.

Carlyle, with his admiration of the strong, admires that force of abnegation which revealed the strength of monastic Christendom. Macaulay, with his passion for the useful, recognises in monastic institutions something peculiarly adapted to promote the well-being of the age which produced them. Froude, with his strongly marked tendency to eclecticism, makes it his special aim to extract from this mediæval system that truth which enabled it to live so long.



Leckie, with that negative bias which characterizes his work on European morals, assumes an adverse attitude in relation to the past, and lashes with unsparing hand the vices of monasticism. Draper, in his *Intellectual Development of Europe*, professes to treat the subject from the standpoint of universal law ; yet we are bound to confess that, when he speaks of mediævalism, he deserts his own position, and seems ever to view it as an interruption of all law. It is not difficult for any of these parties to make out a case in favour of his special view ; there are facts on both sides, and that treatment is not scientific which seeks to eliminate either. For our part, we include both sides of the question, when we say that the monastery was the school ; for the school implies at one and the same moment both progressive development and present imperfection. We believe that, as long as these monasteries occupied the position of places of training, they did good service and fulfilled their destiny ; we believe that when they ceased to discharge that office they became the sources of corruption and the barriers to religious progress.

We know that, for three centuries before the Reformation, the monastic life degenerated more and more into a life of licentiousness, of hypocrisy, of deception, of extortion and bribery, became a disgrace to civilisation, and a blot upon the name of Christianity. Had the Reformation in England accomplished no more than the rooting out of these institutions, it would have performed a signal service to humanity. But let us never forget that by that

time the monasteries had discharged their work ; the vessel had been wrecked, but it had first landed its crew. The monasteries were the schools of mediæval Christendom ; mediæval Christendom was then too old for school, and a combination of external influences had made the disciple wiser than the master. The schools still remained, but they remained without pupils ; they were no longer adapted to their original purpose. The spirit of the world had outgrown them, and, had they been wise, they would have ceased to be. Their mission had been analogous to that of the Jewish nation—preparatory to the coming of something better. Like that nation, they had mistaken their own destiny, and instead of being content to serve as the forerunners of a brighter and a more enduring light, they had sought to perpetuate their existence as sources of independent strength and fountains of absolute knowledge. ‘When that which is perfect has come, that which is in part is done away.’ The monasteries were not the light, but they were sent to prepare for its coming, and in proportion as the light increased, their influence and their power decreased ; when the spirit of manhood dawned, the forms of the school-life became as the memory of a dream.

But we come now to consider this school-life in its historical aspect and in its progressive development. On the threshold of the subject there is one fact which strikes us pre-eminently. It is in the school-days of life that mind begins to exert a practical influence over mind. In childhood the impressions are too fugitive, and the instinct for companionship

too weak, to admit of transition into the thoughts of others; the child-life is comparatively self-contained. But the school throws us into brotherhood, and that at a time when brotherhood becomes available. We are no longer so entirely ruled by the impulse of the moment; our characters are beginning to be formed, and therefore we have something to impart; the most potent influences of life are exerted by the brotherhood of the school. Accordingly, when the spirit of Christianity passed into its school-days, it passed immediately into its kingdom of practical power. It had done little for the world yet, it was to do much now. It had lived an existence very much apart from the outward pursuits of men; it was now to enter into these pursuits, and make them a portion of itself. Henceforth the world was to be its special and peculiar sphere of operation. It had already gathered into itself all the intellectual conceptions of antiquity; it was now to transmute into its being all the practical aims of men, to straighten what was crooked, to smooth what was rugged, to exalt the valleys, and to bring the mountains low. And just as in the natural school-life the contact between mind and mind causes the practical progress to precede the intellectual development, so in the mighty history of the Church at large, the beginning of its scholastic age was marked not by triumphs of thought, but by acts of permanent beneficence. Nor were these acts such as would naturally meet the historian on the surface. The important deeds of history are not always, not generally, the events which make the greatest show

and stir most the minds of their contemporaries. The historical incidents which mould the world live for the most part a hidden life, are unnoticed until they have passed away, and only come to be remembered when they are seen to have generated a mighty force.

So emphatically was it in the present period. The times which immediately succeeded the fall of the Roman Empire were times of bustle and turmoil, of wars and rumours of wars, of outward unrest and individual violence. The East for a moment seemed under the arms of Justinian to have replaced the glory of the West. The Vandal kingdom of Africa was overpowered by the victorious march of Belisarius, and the dominion of Totila in Italy yielded to the military genius of Narses. Yet it is not on these events, high-sounding as they are, and important as they seem, that the historian of Christian development must pause. These were, after all, but evanescent and transitory, and have lost their interest with the passing of the hour which produced them. It is to lowlier scenes that we must turn to find the seeds of permanent impressions, to acts almost disregarded by the generation amongst whom they were performed. There, in the valleys of life, in the spots unfrequented by the crowd, in the deeds unobserved by the eye of a sensuous world, we shall discover the prophecies of that transcendent destiny which it is the purpose and the mission of Christianity to achieve.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### FIRST PRACTICAL INFLUENCES OF THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT.

WE remarked on a former occasion that paganism was essentially a world for the strong. It did not sufficiently value life as life; it esteemed men rather for what they did than for what they were. Hence it had no place for the weak, the destitute, and him that had no helper. It measured the force of human existence by the material results it could produce, and it turned aside its interest from all those whom nature had incapacitated from yielding these results. Christianity was in its essence the very converse of this—it was pre-eminently the home of the weak. It required a sense of human weakness as the necessary condition to its reception; it placed in the highest category of virtues the qualities of meekness, of patience, of steadfast endurance. Its central figure was a cross, and this itself indicated rather a power to bear than a power to achieve. It was the aim of Christianity to root out the pagan conception and implant its own; but we have seen that the accomplishment of this aim was to be worked out rather by a leavening process than by a series of deliberate acts. Not by might, not by power, but by the inward spirit of Christianity, was the great transi-



tion to be effected from the old into the new. Such a work must of necessity be slow, and its beginnings for the most part trivial; yet the trivial beginnings of great developments are often more important than the conquest of kingdoms and the fall of dynasties. The special work which awaited Christianity was the transfusion into the mind of the world of its own distinctive principle—the value of a human soul. It was commissioned to go forth and teach all nations, that life, the humblest life, the most afflicted life, is an object of transcendent importance; that to emancipate the most insignificant individual from the bondage of ignorance and corruption is a far nobler achievement than to subdue the pride of empires; and that to impart comfort to a single sorrowful heart is a greater mark of true heroism than to wear the palm of victory and wield the sceptre of despotic command. That was to be Christianity's work, and nobly was Christianity to perform it. We have seen that during its early days its undue antagonism to the world prevented it from exerting its proper and legitimate influence. We have seen that even the union of Church and State, founded originally as it was rather on expediency than on principle, did not at once contribute to ameliorate the condition of the world. The true work of Christianity begins where the Roman Empire ends. Hitherto the practical effects of the Christian religion upon the secular and social life of mankind may be said to have been limited to two important measures. The first was the abolition by Constantine of those gladiatorial exhibitions which so peculiarly tended to harden the pagan mind.

The second was more important, because it was more significant, more distinctively Christian, more emblematic of the new life—it was the passing of that law of Valentinian which made infanticide a capital offence. In this there was certainly the dawn of that reverence for life in its weakest form which distinguishes Christ's religion from all other religions; and it is to the credit of the empire, that, before it passed away, it left some evidence that the Christian spirit had breathed upon it. But even in this direction there was still much to be done. The abolition of infanticide did not strike at the roots of the matter. Those children who had come into the world with inherent weakness, with hereditary taint, with bodily deformity, or with congenital defect, were indeed permitted to live, but they were not suffered to enjoy life. A parent was still at liberty to expose his afflicted child, to cast him out upon the world deserted and disowned; and the hand that rescued him was empowered by law to appropriate him as a slave. That this servitude of exposed infants should have continued for centuries under the Christian dispensation, that it should have lasted as long as European slavery itself, that during so many years no public movement should have been made to destroy a practice which was a blot even upon serfdom, is a circumstance which the historian of Christianity may not contemplate without pain. Yet it is satisfactory to know that all this time there was going on an underground movement—a work which, although hidden in its operation and slow in its development, was yet steadily and surely sapping the

foundations of this infamous traffic. It is satisfactory to know that, although unsupported by the secular arm, the spirit of Christianity was gradually restraining the brute force of that arm, by suffusing the frame of the community with a higher and a holier life. Where the State refrained from interference, the monasteries stepped in. They suggested to the world a magnificent plan of ministration to human suffering. They said, Let the letter of the law remain, we shall alter its spirit. Let these abandoned children, if it must be so, be still liable to servitude; we shall transmute the servitude of earth into the service of heaven. We shall search for these little outcasts in the deserts and waste places, we shall lay our hands on them and gather them into our own fold; they shall grow up under our nurture, they shall be trained in our discipline, they shall be educated in our school; and the sense of bondage shall be overshadowed and lost in the consciousness of that service which is the highest freedom. That was what the monasteries said; and they did not merely say it—they did it. Throughout the earlier period of the scholastic age, we find ever multiplying the fruits of their great design. Some of them were so conspicuous in the work, that they may be said to have originated the idea of foundling hospitals. At Treves, at Angers, and at Milan, we find these institutions recognised as the expressions of Christian humanity; and when the Council of Rouen enacted that the child laid at a church door could be claimed as the property of the Church, it extended still farther the sphere on which the spirit of Christianity could

move. In these homes for the foundling there were contained the seeds of a great principle—the duty of Christianity to redeem the lives of men. Captivity was already beginning to be taken captive; and in rescuing one portion of the community from the curse and the thrall of slavery, the first link was broken in the chain of slavery itself.

But we advance a step farther, and we find the principle of reverence for infant life extending itself into an appreciation of the truth that life is an awful trust to a responsible man. We are arrested in the fifth century by the voice of the Council of Arles, declaring suicide to be the result of diabolical suggestion; in the sixth, we hear the Council of Prague commanding that the suicide should be debarred from burial rites and deprived of spiritual intercession. These are more important facts than many theological decisions. With the form in which they are expressed we have nothing to do—that partakes of the harshness and intolerance which belong to an uncivilised age. But beneath the form there is a spirit, and it is most prophetic—it points again to the great process of transition, by which old things were to pass away and all things to become new. For what is that which is really indicated by this enactment of the Christian Church? It is nothing less than the formation of a new ideal of heroism. Paganism and Christianity had alike recognised individual courage as one of the noblest attributes of humanity—paganism, indeed, had made it the essential attribute. But here their agreement ended and their difference began. The courage of the



pagan and the courage of the Christian were vastly dissimilar, in some respects even contrary qualities. The essence of pagan courage was the contempt of death; the brave man was the man who was able to meet the last enemy with a stoical indifference; the bravest man of all was he who was able, by his own hand, to put an end to his existence. Modern civilisation speaks of the suicide with bated breath; pre-Christian culture points with proud assurance to the noble death of Cato. Now what is it that has produced this change? It is not that the Christian is less brave than the heathen; it is that he has altered his ideal of bravery.

We have already seen that the essence of Christianity, that feature in it which was pre-eminently distinctive and new, was the idea of the Cross. Let us mark well how much is implied in this. The moment the Christian idea took possession of the pagan world, it was inevitable that it should create an entirely original standard of heroism. Hitherto the sufferers of the world had been the objects of unmitigated contempt; they were now to be the kings and priests of society—the ideals of a perfect courage and the heroes of a deathless fame. Hitherto the strong man had been he who was capable of performing mighty deeds; the strongest was now to be he who could endure a great weight of afflictions. Hitherto the highest expression of courage had been the power to put an end to life's calamities by extinguishing life itself; it was now to find its most glorious manifestation in the power to abstain from death—to bear up manfully against the swelling tide, to receive the



rolling billows and yet desire to live. And, if we mistake not, it is this instinct of the Christian heart which underlies the stripes and penances, the fastings and flagellations, the laceration of body and depression of soul, which the monastery recognised as the signs of a regenerated nature. Amidst all their absurdity, amidst all their exaggeration, amidst all that in them was undoubtedly adverse to the true spirit of Christianity, there was yet this one great truth, essentially Christian and pre-eminently fruitful—the truth that life is valuable by reason of its very sorrows; that it is good to bear these sorrows and still to live; and that in the act of bearing them, and bearing the life that carries them, we are doing something more courageous, more God-like, more divine, than if we hastened to obliterate their pain in the great sleep of death. That was what monasticism meant to say, though it spoke it with a broken utterance and pictured it in a distorted image. That was what the Council of Arles and the Council of Prague meant to say, though they clothed their thought in the harshness of an uncultivated age. They were aiming to express the truth that life is more solemn than death, and to an earnest man more difficult to bear than death. They were striving to give expression to the thought that a new standard of bravery was arising in the world, and that the heroes of the future would be they who should carry the greatest burdens without longing for the end.

Two points had thus been asserted by the spirit of Christianity—the value and the sacredness of human life. There was a third point, which, although in-

directly involved in these, was not outwardly expressed—we mean the individual rights of life. The liberty of man as man was too gigantic a subject to be embraced in the decree of a Christian council; it required to be evolved through the ages. Yet already we find as it were the beginnings of the stream. There is one little incident of this period which ought not to be overlooked; it was not great in itself, but it was one of those influences which helped in combination with others to produce great results—we allude to the foundation of the Benedictine monasteries. In 529 that order was instituted by Benedict of Nursia, whose name it bears. He proposed a new rule of monastic life. Hitherto the monk had been exclusively a man of prayer. He had looked upon religion merely on its mystical side, had pondered only on those feelings of self-humiliation which it ought to engender. Benedict of Nursia perceived that there was something defective here—that it represented the truth, but not the whole truth; that it was the soul of religion without its body. He perceived that, however grand a sentiment the thought of self-crucifixion was, it must evaporate in grandeur as long as it remained a sentiment; that if it would preserve its existence, it must incarnate itself in practical deeds. Accordingly, he proposed to add another element to the discipline of the monastery. The monk was to be still a man of prayer, but he was to be no longer a man of prayer alone; in addition to his duties of meditation, he was to undertake the duties of secular labour. Nor was that labour to be limited to the field of intellectual

pursuits ; it was to occupy that, but it was not to be bounded by it. The monk was to be the educator of youth, but he was also to be something more. He was to work with the hand as well as with the mind, to engage in manual exercise,—to till the lands in connection with the monasteries, to be the dresser and the keeper of the garden of God's Eden. And it was in this manual exercise that the monastery began to open a path for freedom. Up to this time labour had been the prerogative of the slave. To toil with the sweat of the brow had been the mark of the bondsman, the proof of servility and meanness. Christianity must elevate the association of labour, must lift it from a degraded into a noble thought. And how was Christianity to produce such a transformation ? how was the inveterate prejudice of ages to be rooted out and scattered to the winds ? There was one way, and one alone, in which it could be done, and that way Christianity proposed to follow. Let it take up into its own nature the idea of labour, let it associate with itself the thought of manual toil, let it come into intimate union with that work of the hands which men had called ignoble ; such was the scheme of the Christian spirit. That scheme it followed out bravely and unflinchingly ; and what was the result ? The fetters did not fall from the slave, but they became golden fetters. Labour was ennobled, it was lifted from the dust and set upon a throne. The association of toil with infamy was broken for ever, and a new association was formed in its room. The rough work of the hands was reflected by that light which makes all things beautiful. It

was taken up into Christian thought, amalgamated with Christian life, made an essential part of Christian practice, and in the process of elevation all the disgrace dropt from it and left it transformed. It was such a transformation as we see in the idea of the Cross itself; it had once been the badge of the slave, it was now the banner of the hero. The state of servitude remained, but the act of servitude was exalted, and it was inevitable that the exaltation of active labour should ere long reflect its lustre on the personal condition of the slave.

Nor, indeed, did this generation pass until the effects of this new association began to operate on the world. The reign of Justinian can boast of three measures all tending in the direction of the rights of man, and pointing prophetically to the time when servitude should cease to be. All through the history of paganism we find the imposition of restrictions to the enfranchisement of the slave; it was not forbidden, but it was not encouraged. With Justinian a contrary tendency appears; manumission is recognised as desirable, and the restrictions of the past are abolished. All through the history of paganism the emancipated slave holds an inferior position to him who has been always free; he represents a class intermediate between the serf and the freeman. With Justinian there dawns a kindlier light, and society admits the necessity of giving in full measure what it gives at all. The emancipated slave, by the very act of his emancipation, starts into a position of equality with the freeman, and enters at once into nearly all the privileges which devolve by right upon



the freeborn. All through pagan history the slave stands apart from other men, with a great gulf fixed between them, and with no means of communication. With Justinian the gulf is already half-spanned; the slave, with the consent of his master, may marry a freewoman, and, in the event of his emancipation, his children become the legal heirs of his liberty. In these measures can we fail to recognise the operation of a new and higher life? Is it not evident that there is a power piercing through the darkness, and carrying healing in its beams? The spirit of Christianity has begun to assert its claims over the spirit of man, has awakened at last to the recognition of its destiny as a world-power. There has opened to it a new and wider field of enterprise; its mission of regeneration has assumed a grander aspect. It no longer contemplates itself as the antagonist of the world; it aims at union with the world, it seeks to lift the world into its own light, and make the secular a province of the sacred. It has entered into alliance with all the influences that ennoble man—with culture, with civilisation, with order, with work, with freedom; and with the strength of such allies, it cannot fail to lead the thoughts of men into harmony with the thought of God.

In speaking of the rights of man in connection with the measures of Justinian, there is a collateral subject which should not be wholly overlooked—we mean the social position of woman. It is not too much to affirm that the distinctive qualities of woman had in general been unappreciated by the pre-Chris-



tian world. It is true that in the far distant and half-mythical Sabine age, as in one or two other periods equally remote and equally obscure, we have presented to us pictures of domestic happiness, of conjugal felicity, of high chastity, and of modest virtue, which would reflect a glory upon any religious faith; but we have no means of ascertaining how far these are Utopian, and how far the product of history. This much we do know, that in proportion as our historical materials increase, the width of that gulf increases which divides the Christian from the pagan conception of female virtue. It is not that in the stage of pre-Christian culture the position of woman was of necessity inferior. In some countries it was so—there were nations in which she was little better than a slave; but as this was not a universal experience, it would be unfair to lay it to the charge of paganism in the abstract. The histories of Greece and Rome exhibit an entirely contrary state of matters. We find there the effect of female influence coming forth in the most startling political incidents, diverting the current of popular opinion, and changing the course of public events. Yet it is a significant fact, that those types of the female mind which thus influenced classic history were precisely the types to which modern civilisation would deny the name of woman. There was female influence in the palace, but it came, not from the empress, but from the courtesan; there was female influence in the abode of the statesman, but it came, not from the wife, but from the mistress. Marriage conferred no dignity, virtue conferred no dignity; nothing conferred dignity but

physical beauty and meretricious charms. In the Roman world the nuptial ceremony was performed under the auspices of religion, but the moment the act was consummated it seemed to lose its sacramental value ; the wife retired into the background, and surrendered to others the reins of empire. Even in the government of her own family she occupied a subordinate place. It is a highly significant circumstance, that in all pagan households the guardianship of the son was committed exclusively to the father ; significant, but not inconsistent. The virtues of paganism were manly virtues ; the world before Christ, as we have seen, idealized the strong, the vigorous, the muscular, and it was in strict consistency with this type of thought that strength, vigour, and muscular force should constitute the main objects in the education of a Roman youth. We have already marked how strongly this ancient belief contributed to retard the religious development of Augustine, how the influence of the mother was warped and counteracted by the pagan ideal of the father ; so little at the close of four centuries had Christianity effected in the transformation of the secular world. But when we have travelled a century beyond Augustine, we become conscious that we are in the presence of a new order of thoughts. Amidst the laws of the Emperor Justinian, there is one which implies more than it expresses ; it enacts that henceforth the guardianship of the son shall be entrusted to the mother. Such an enactment is alone sufficient to prove that the spirit of Christianity had been fast permeating the minds of men. Human

thought was displacing man from his lofty throne, and exalting woman into his room. Those qualities which had once been deemed the essence of perfection were sinking from their elevated station in the imagination of the public mind, and up from the valleys there were rising to supply their place those virtues in which hitherto the world had seen no beauty. Manhood was still to be the type of earth, but womanhood was to be the ideal of heaven. The strong, the muscular, the warlike, were still to be recognised as worthy of esteem ; yet they were to exist in the thoughts of men no longer as the representatives of a perfect blessedness, but only as the necessary protections in a world of strife and sin. The gentle, the modest, the retiring, the souls that by patience and long-suffering had attained to the rest of resignation, the hearts that had cast their gold into the furnace of sorrow and received it back more precious, the minds that had been elevated by trial and purified by the bearing of the Cross, the unselfish, self-forgetting lives which had striven to find their joy in ministration to wants not their own,—these were henceforth to be the ideals of a pure humanity, and these are the ideals of the perfect type of womanhood.

Around this conception, so refined, so beautiful, so ennobling, the spirit of Christianity was now to hover. Around this thought of a human nature in which the masculine attributes were ennobled, because chastened, by the female heart, the mind of the Church was to centre with a rapt and breathless interest ; it was to find here a new starting-point and

a new goal, the well-spring of a loftier life than that of physical power, the source of a higher joy than that of temporal gain. Mediævalism had mighty influences at its command; it had feudal barons and despotic kingdoms and ecclesiastical agencies carrying more than regal power, but there was not one of all its mighty forces which contributed half so much to make it strong as this lofty ideal of womanhood which it bore in its heart; this was the source of its chivalry, this was the master-light of all its seeing. Such an ideal could not live without a name, such a thought could not remain without embodiment. It cried out for some human form in which to incarnate itself, and it was in the selection of that form that it lost its glory. The thought was beautiful, the desire for embodiment was beautiful; but when it succeeded in gratifying that desire by its incarnation in the form of Mary, it fell short of its perfect destiny, and missed its highest aim.

Before quitting this topic of the rights of man, we may remark that it was greatly to the advantage of Europe that its best and most powerful kingdoms were colonized so early by Christian missionaries. A few centuries later would have been too late; the Papal idea had then taken solid and definite form. We are, in general, strongly conservative in our first religious impressions: if we receive Christianity with a free Protestant bias, we shall probably hold it with that bias; if we receive it as a dictum of human authority, we shall find it difficult to disengage it from such associations. This



was precisely the experience of European Christianity. Those nations which embraced the Christian faith, while yet the monastery was higher than the Papacy, continued to hold that faith with an anti-papal tendency. Already, ere the fifth century closed, the victorious Clovis had signalized his victory by passing over with his whole kingdom into the fold of Christianity, and France has of all Catholic nations been the least Papal, the most opposed to religious despotism. At an even earlier period Germany had listened to the message of the new faith; and we know what Germany has been—the very corner-stone of religious liberty. Within seventy years of the conversion of Clovis, Columba, with his band of missionaries, passed over into Scotland, and established on the shores of Iona a form of Christianity far more monastic than episcopal. Scotland never lost that first taste of freedom, and through all the darkness of the darkest ages it remained the steady foe of Papal aggression. Thirty years more, and we find the monk Augustine bearing the lamp of truth into the country of the Anglo-Saxons. It was then that England received the breath of the Christian spirit, and never through all its history has it ceased to associate that spirit with the freedom of the intellect and the liberty of the subject. To Saxon England, indeed, the advent of this monastic Christianity was at present a special boon. Upon the soil of sovereign Britain seven kingdoms strove for mastery, and the history of the nation was opening in blood and tears. It was exhibiting, as yet, only a long catalogue of horrors, in which the



strong trampled on the weak, and the vanquished found no room to live. Upon this scene of sorrow the monasteries descended as a gift from God. Here were houses of refuge for the vanquished; here were asylums for the weak; here were calm retreats to which the labouring and the heavy-laden might repair for rest. And it is surprising from what diverse ranks this train of suppliants for human succour was swelled. It was recruited not alone by frail women and infirm men, not alone by the poor and needy, not alone by those who fled from the vengeance of a violated law. More than one of the Saxon kings was there. More than one sovereign, weary of the cares of empire,—worn out by the long conflict, in which, perhaps, he had once been the most eager,—came to the door of the monastery, and asked for admittance. The visible kingdom of Christ was beginning to assert its power over the kings of the earth, and the still small voice was slowly but surely conquering the thunder, the earthquake, and the fire. With such bright associations impending over their origin, we cannot wonder that in this country the monastic institutions were more authoritative than the Papal government. We cannot wonder that they exercised over the English mind an influence which the holy Roman Empire never attained. We cannot wonder that they represented for a long time the spirit of Protestantism itself, and reminded the nation of its pristine privileges. In an age when men were, for the most part, the mechanical agents of a despotic power, they kept alive in many souls the sense of personal piety and individual

responsibility; and at a time when outward forms and ceremonies were usurping our human interest in the lives of men, they held aloft the ideal of humanity, and proclaimed aloud the brotherhood of souls.

## CHAPTER XX.

### FIRST INTELLECTUAL STAGE OF THE SCHOOL-LIFE.

PARALLEL with those practical movements we have been describing, there was going on in the Christian Church an educational process. The aim of all education is the attainment of self-knowledge. Its ultimate design is not the insertion of facts into the mind, but the revelation of the mind itself; the very word means a drawing out. Every educational process must contemplate as its goal the awakening of the mental faculties, the calling out into consciousness what is latent, and the revealing in actual life what is dormant within the soul; it has only fulfilled its purpose when it has disclosed to the human mind the treasures that lie buried within it. But while, undoubtedly, it is so—while self-knowledge is unquestionably the goal of education, that education would be very defective which should attempt to begin by revealing man to himself. The thought of humanity, of being, of intellect, of life in general, is too abstract to be brought before the schoolboy; he must approach it through a medium; he must proceed, not from within to without, but from without to within. Hence, if education ends with self-knowledge, it begins with the knowledge of

that which is not ourselves. It starts with the things of sense, with the study of outward objects, with the facts which belong to the seen and temporal world. It conveys the elements of language, imprints upon eye and ear those visible and audible signs which are the representations of human thought, and imparts the conventional rules by which men have agreed to use them. It enters into the contemplation of nature, gathers up its facts into laws, and applies its laws to surrounding objects. It looks into the outward deeds of men, yet its first survey of human history is little more than the contemplation of the figures in a picture ; its attention is fixed upon the floating panorama, and it is long ere it discerns the changeless life behind it. All education, in short, begins with the study of images.

Now the spirit of Christianity was to pass through exactly the same experience. It was entering upon its school-life, and the aim of that school-life was to be the revelation of its own inward riches. Yet that revelation could only be reached through the medium of outward forms. It was so in the very dawn of Christianity's history ; the Master spoke in parables to the opening child-life. These parables were the outward images of things invisible, and as long as the living voice remained the parables sufficed. But the living voice of the Master passed away, and there was none amongst His followers who could speak to the multitude ; none who possessed a nature at once so divine and so human as to unite the thoughts of heaven to the forms and analogies of earth. The learned may be addressed by abstract reasoning, the

cultured may be approached by studied rhetoric, but the mass of the people can only be reached by appealing to the objects that meet the outward eye. And it was from the mass of the people that Christianity formed its first ranks. Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble, were originally attracted into the Christian army; it was composed, for the most part, of the poor, the weak, and the despised—those who worked with their own hands, and earned their bread by the sweat of their brow. They had no education, no culture, no refinement; the majority of them were probably unable to read. They were therefore peculiarly dependent upon an authoritative oral tradition, and they clung to that tradition as long as it remained. But as the scenes of Galilee and Gennesaret receded into the background, as one by one the witnesses of the outward history passed away, and as more and more the Church felt the necessity of fixing its love upon a Christ who was unseen, there was experienced a great blank in the Christian consciousness. In course of time the canon was completed, and the written word took the place of the oral tradition, but to a generation so unlettered the written word itself was almost a sealed book. There was wanted some medium of revelation to make the Bible intelligible to those whose own intelligence was undeveloped; the parable must be restored in the form of the picture and the image, and the eye must be allowed to see what the untutored intellect was unable to comprehend.

And yet the Church was most unwilling to resort



to such a remedy. Pictures and images belonged to art, and art was associated with paganism ; how could the spirit of Christianity consistently connect itself with such elements as these ? At first it refused altogether, and its earliest concession was made to the pressure of a great necessity. The pagans kept alive their religion by engraving on their household utensils the forms of their divinities. This was at least high worldly wisdom, and it recognised in a figure the truth of the profound principle that religious faith can only be preserved by becoming an integral part of daily and domestic life. Christianity saw that paganism was here in the right, and reluctantly yielded to the demand of the hour. Even yet, however, the use of images in the Church was extremely limited ; it was confined at first to one Gnostic sect, and from a centre so suspicious its diffusion could not be otherwise than slow. It was when the dream of secular dominion arose, when Christianity borrowed from paganism many of its outward surroundings, and when paganism imbibed from Christianity somewhat of its softness and its gentleness, that the voluntary alliance began between religion and art. By the time the Western empire had fallen, that alliance had been completed, and the Church had recognised the necessity of associating the good with the beautiful. In spite of original antagonism, in spite of prejudices yet lingering in individual minds, in spite of the actual prohibition of more than one provincial synod, the use of the image in worship had become a general practice. That first dream of secular dominion, which had helped to

promote it, was indeed shattered and dispelled; in the fall of imperial Rome it vanished away. But the materializing tendency which it had awakened did not pass with it, nor was it desirable that it should pass.

The overthrow of the Roman Empire made the use of the image in public worship more essential than ever. That event, as we have seen, reduced the pagan world from a field of culture to a scene of barrenness; plucked up the wheat, and planted the tares in its room; destroyed those fruits which had been nurtured by classic soil, and sowed Europe with the seeds of anarchy and disorder. Here were barbarous tribes, whose bent of mind was essentially materialistic; who had known nothing of the arts of peace, and little of the softer passions of the human heart; who, even in the secular culture of pagan life, were entirely undeveloped, and whose conceptions of religious life were all to begin. How was Christianity to deal with these men? To reveal its abstract mysteries would have been to speak in a foreign tongue; to read from the written word would have been to anticipate the stage of their development. There was one course, and one alone, open to the Christianity of that age—it must deal with men as it found them. Steeped in materialism as they were, it must approach them through materialism; pent up as they were within the bounds of the external world, it must take hold of the external world, and make it a medium of revelation. That was what Christianity meant to do by its multiplied rites and ceremonies, by the ever-increasing gorgeousness of its ritual, by the celebration of its worship amid

such brilliant accompaniments ; it meant to render itself attractive by associating itself with those forms which had always been attractive to the pagan mind. And who shall say that such an aim was not laudable ? who shall say that it discharged no place in history ? It fulfilled the most important, because the most difficult, of all functions,—the opening of the school-life ; the communication of truth to the ignorant ; the presentation in visible form of eternal realities ; the speaking in parables of the kingdom of God.

All this was well, and it would have been well had it ended here. But it did not end here. There is a danger to which the individual mind is liable in the first stage of its school-life—it is apt to take the symbol for the thought which it symbolizes, to substitute the shadow for the substance. That danger befell the school-life of Christian intelligence, and Christian intelligence succumbed to it. The Church had been permitted to employ images as illustrations of truth, and to a primitive age this concession was an unspeakable boon. Yet it is just to a primitive age that such a concession is most dangerous. The transition from image-representation to image-worship is often very quick and always very easy. The human mind, at an early period of its development, finds help in external forms ; that which is seen and temporal awakens reverence for the unseen and eternal. Is it surprising that frequently the reverence should be transferred from the invisible to the visible, and that the form should eventually usurp the place of the living spirit ? But if this is a natural tendency of human nature at all times, it received an additional

impulse in the Church of mediævalism. In that Church there existed a special reason for image-worship, and that reason lay in the radical defect of the whole system.

To inquire into the cause of image-worship is to inquire into the cause of the Reformation, for it is to put the hand upon that distinctive want which made the Reformation a necessity. And what is this want in the mediæval system? what is this defect which lies at the root of all its errors, and tarnishes all its glories? It is a defect for whose origin mediævalism is not responsible. We have already pointed out its beginnings in the Church of the second century; we have seen its baneful influence upon the doctrines of Gnosticism, and we have marked how that influence was transmitted to after days. The leading error of the second century, the leading error of Gnosticism, the leading error of the mediæval Church was one and the same; it was the divorce between the divine and the human in the person of Christianity's Founder. The Church had come to reverence a Christ whose divinity had lifted Him outside of humanity, raised Him above its joys, exalted Him beyond the reach of its sorrows. It had fixed its worship upon one who had ascended, not in human nature, but out of human nature; who had surmounted the earthly conditions in such a way as to leave them far behind, and had entered upon an existence essentially superhuman. Hence, gradually from the thought of Christ the mediæval Church eliminated all the softer attributes, stripped Him of the gentleness, the compassion, the long-suffering, and the sympathy which had endeared

Him to the heart of man, and clothed Him in the armour of a terrible and unearthly majesty. The present Redeemer faded away from the thoughts of men, and in His room there sat enthroned in the far heaven a Christ who bore in His hand the flaming sword of justice, waiting to execute vengeance upon the transgressors of His law. He was no longer the brother of humanity; He was the omnipotent judge of mankind. He was no longer the refuge and the strength for the passing hour; He lived only for the work of the future, for that dread day when the books should be opened and the secrets of all hearts should be revealed. He was no longer a being to be approached with the familiar accents of Galilean fishermen, or by the direct supplications of the oppressed and the humble; He was exalted on an inaccessible throne, surrounded by a light which no man could behold and live, and only to be reached by the intervention of celestial spirits. And it was here that the logical consequence of such a system appeared. Christ was banished from His creation; He was placed upon a height so stupendous, that between Him and His worshippers there stretched a yawning void.

How was that void to be filled? It was impossible it should be suffered to remain. The principle of religious life is faith, but faith must appropriate its object. It cannot lay hold of one whom it believes to be infinitely remote and eternally inaccessible; in the very effort to do so, it must faint and die. The Christ of mediævalism *was* believed to be infinitely remote, and therefore, in the Protestant sense of the



word, appropriation of such a Christ was impossible. But was there on that account to be no faith? Was religion to die for want of an object? The instincts of humanity forbade it. Some remedy must be devised whereby the heart of Christendom might find a resting-place, and keep alive the glow of its spiritual life. That remedy was found in the reverence of the image, in the substitution of the symbol for the reality. Gradually that Church, which had tried to centre its affections upon an absent Lord, found that its affections must be rekindled by the mediation of some earthly form. It had dismissed from its thoughts the idea of a spiritual presence; it must regain that presence through the intervention of material agencies. It must find it in the water of baptism, in the bread and wine of communion, in the act of ordination, in the relics of saints, in the tombs of martyrs, in the heart of monasteries, and in the walls of consecrated cathedrals. It must see it in the figure of a visible cross, in the monuments raised to a celestial hierarchy, and in the observance of festivals in memory of the sainted dead. The presence of Christ was now to be sought through the intercession of others; too awful to be approached face to face, it was to be seen, foreshadowed, and symbolized through the veil of natural forms, and these natural forms were to supply the void which the far-exalted Christ had left in the human soul.

High above all other images there towered one—that of the Virgin mother. From the moment when the Council of Ephesus declared her entitled to be called the Mother of God, she became the cynosure

of every eye, and another century had not closed until a special festival was instituted in her honour. In the circumstances of the scholastic Church we cannot wonder at this. There were two reasons which clearly necessitated the exaltation of the Virgin; the one had its root in the Christian heart, the other in the Christian intellect. Neither of them would, of course, have had any weight in a church perfectly pure, a church whose Christ was immediately present to the soul; but in an ecclesiastical system which had admitted a divorce of the divine and the human, the heart and the intellect alike demanded the apotheosis of Mary. On the one hand, the heart of Christendom was still fixed upon its absent Lord, fixed upon Him in the knowledge of His absence, and in the deep yearning to bring Him back once more. How was that yearning to be expressed by the heart of Christendom? Unable to find direct communion with Christ, it must lay hold of those objects which on earth were to Him the nearest and the dearest, in order that it might have the gift next best to the actual possession of the Master. And what was naturally the gift next best? who was the being whom earthly association could with most propriety connect with the life of the Redeemer? Surely it must be she whom all generations were to call blessed, in having been made an instrument in the salvation of mankind. That was the heart's reason for the exaltation of Mary—an instinct of affection for the ascended Lord striving to span the gulf which divided earth from heaven. But the Christian intellect, as well as the Christian heart,

had a reason for the apotheosis. We have already seen how the imagination of Christendom had been suffused with a new ideal of greatness; how the masculine had given place to the feminine type, and woman had enthroned herself as the highest image of humanity. The exaltation of Mary was the expression of that thought—a noble thought, and an unworthy expression. We have pointed out how the softer virtues, which belong more prominently to womanhood, do indeed peculiarly constitute the elements of the Christian life. We have pointed out how necessary it was that these virtues should be seen concentrated in a single figure, focussed in one living form. Thus far we are at one, thus far all Protestantism may be at one, with the Church of mediævalism. But here their paths diverge, and widen their distance more and more. There was lying at the very door of the Church a visible representation of all it wanted to portray. The highest type of womanhood, as well as the highest type of manhood, was really revealed in the portraiture of the great Master, embodying as it did the attributes of universal humanity. In that portraiture were combined the gentleness of woman and the strength of man; the more than feminine tenderness and the more than masculine power; the softness, the pity, the endurance, the depth of emotional impulse which distinguish woman, and the vigour of thought and action, the strength of will, the inflexible determination of purpose which form the distinctive features of man. In the image of Christ Himself both sides of human nature could easily find their

representative ; in the image of Christ Himself, the Church of opening mediævalism might well have seen the perfect incarnation of that side of human nature which it most admired. But this was precisely what it did not see ; it feared to degrade its Lord by giving Him a definite form, it feared to lower His divinity by associating that divinity with any thought of the human. Therefore it closed its eyes upon the portrait of the Master, and set itself to paint a new portrait. It took up the attributes which it had found in the living Christ, and wove them into the figure of the Virgin mother ; a figure purely ideal, created out of the Church's own imagining, though not inexpressive of its leading want. That want was the need of a human Christ—of a Christ who should be more than the judge with the flaming sword, more than the King of heaven, more than the ascended Lord ; it was the craving for one who should fill the life of the present, minister to the necessities of the hour, and supply direct communion to the heart in every moment of its pulsation. That was the want which the Church expressed in the apotheosis of Mary ; it expressed it without supplying it, but this it could only learn by centuries of bitter experience. It was reserved for Protestantism to give prominence to Christ's humanity, to sweep away the intermediate links, and bring the thought of the Master into immediate communion with the soul. Image-worship in general, and Mariolatry in particular, were in the meantime to be the defective remedies of a defective creed, were to serve in some measure to connect the seen with the unseen, and to prevent the spirit of



Christianity from losing altogether its sight of the goal.

It seems to us, indeed, that had it not been for an additional agency, the representation of the invisible by images would not alone have prevented the extinction of Christian faith. Let the object of worship be conceived as separate from the soul, that object will ultimately recede from the thoughts altogether. A God in the air, a Christ limited to the heavens, a being who is confined to a throne of solitary majesty, cannot continue long to be adored; He will be eclipsed in time by the thought of His own works. The mediæval Church was basing its religion upon just such a conception as this—the conception of a God too great to be near, and too majestic to be human. Yet it must be confessed, that even in its tenderest days the mediæval Church did not lose its consciousness of God, did not wholly separate itself from the vital power of Christianity. It is natural to ask how, under a creed so disadvantageous to piety, so much spiritual life should still have been able to endure. To attribute it entirely to the power of image-representation over a sensuous age would, in our opinion, be impossible; these visual representations had undoubtedly their place, but their place was that rather of coadjutors than of originators. It seems to us that the agency which made mediævalism higher than its creed was the existence of an illusory belief in the world of science—we mean the Ptolemaic theory of astronomy. The men of that age had a very proud idea of their own position in the universe; they believed the earth to be its centre,



standing fixed and immoveable in space, with all the planets, and suns, and systems circling round it. A more kindly illusion was never permitted to a primitive stage of human development; it served a real and a high purpose, and, if not itself the truth, it paved the way for truth. To men holding such a belief, the worship of a far-off God was infinitely less dangerous than it would have been to an age of scientific culture. They placed the object of their adoration at the extremity of the universe, but they believed the earth which they trod to be the centre of that universe. Around this little spot all creation moved, for the sake of this little spot all creation lived. On this point were fastened the eyes of angel and archangel, of cherubim and seraphim, of the dead glorified and unglorified, of the Virgin mother and the ascended Christ and the infinite Father. On this object were concentrated all the designs of creation. It was for earth alone that the sun shone by day and the moon by night; for earth alone that the mandate had been spoken, 'Let there be light;' for earth alone that the drama of universal history had been suffered to open at all. We know how Copernicus broke the spell, and showed the world that it was one of the least amongst infinite myriads; we know how the Church resisted this awakening, and we do not wonder at its resistance. Protestantism was well able to bear its physical humbling, because it received in compensation a spiritual exaltation—it obtained the thought of an immediate communion with God. But the Church of scholasticism had still its far-off deity, and when it

lost the Ptolemaic system, it lost the only link which prevented the distant from becoming the vanishing. When that time came, the Church could only save itself by purifying its creed ; in the meantime, it was its scientific error which kept its faith religious, even while its creed was impure.

We have thus, in the present and in the two preceding chapters, endeavoured briefly to exhibit the leading features of the spirit of mediævalism. We have tried to consider the subject calmly and impartially, without any previous bias, and without any religious prejudice. We have sought to approach the matter entirely from the scientific standpoint of historical observation, have studied to estimate fairly that position in history which scholasticism is entitled to hold, and have attempted, in rapid survey, to reveal at once its strength and its weakness. It will now be time, however, to resume the thread of our historical narrative. We have brought the spirit of Christianity down to that stage of life which is often the most critical. We have seen it entering into the school, and opening its scholastic education with the study of outward forms ; and we have seen it becoming so engrossed in these forms, that its own spirituality is in danger. We have reached, in short, that period which has been called the materialism of the Christian Church—the conquest of mind by matter. Are we, then, to be arrested in our progress? Has the development of Christianity been at last compelled to pause before an impenetrable barrier? has its advance to its destined goal been effectually and finally intercepted? For one mo-

ment the historian is inclined to believe so. As he stands upon the threshold of the mediæval age, and beholds the iron taking the place of the gold, the empiricism supplanting the culture, the image substituted for the thought, it almost seems to him as if the sun of progress had set. Suddenly he is startled out of his despair by one of the most remarkable phenomena of history. From the far East there is heard the approach of a terrible storm—a blast which, in its fierce and relentless sweep, is to shake the forms and level the images with the dust, and bring the mind of Christendom again into the unimpeded presence of the Eternal, Immortal, and Invisible. To the consideration of this great renaissance we must now direct our thoughts.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### PROTESTANT INFLUENCE OF MOHAMMEDANISM.

GREAT transitions commonly find their beginnings in a single soul. Their source is apparently insignificant, and generally undetected, until the stream of history has revealed its power. It was so pre-eminently with that mighty movement, which, beginning with an obscure Arabian tribe, eventually influenced the destinies of three vast continents. While the Greek Empire was struggling to preserve the semblance of its ancient glory, while Western Europe was striving to consolidate its lawless and discordant elements, while the spirit of Christianity, in its efforts to mould these elements into itself, was becoming moulded by them into a form at variance with its pristine purity, there was growing up at Mecca a humble, unpretentious youth, earning his bread by the sweat of his brow, and ignorant of those tremendous destinies that slept within him. That youth was Mohammed, the founder of that religion which, next to Christianity, has exerted over civilised Europe the mightiest and most permanent influence. He scarcely emerges into view until he has reached the meridian of manhood. The facts recorded of his childhood and of his youth are few

and badly authenticated, and the blank has been filled up by legend. Deprived early of parental care, cast upon the protection of strangers, forced from tender years to support himself by the work of his own hands, we find him at six-and-twenty discharging the occupation of a camel-driver. Then suddenly his fortune changes ; the mistress in whose service he labours becomes enamoured of him, marries him, translates him in a moment from great poverty into vast wealth. Not thus, however, is Mohammed to come forth before the world ; there is preparing for him a new process of humbling. This time it is the spiritual nature of the man which is to be depressed ; he is to undergo a silent stage of inward death, and out of that he is to arise with a crown. He arrives at his fortieth year, and all at once the waters gather round him. He becomes subject to terrible visions, in which he is commanded to abandon the belief of his fathers. Old forms are shaken, old associations broken, old ties severed, and he seems to hear a voice calling him to go forth alone. The sense of a dread mission has fallen upon him. The world has been wandering for ages over the wrong road, and he has been wandering with it ; he must come back and bring the world back. The spiritual faith of the past has been a delusion ; he must inaugurate a new faith within himself and within mankind—the very years of history must in him be dated from a fresh beginning. There is no self-consciousness in the thought ; it has all the pain of self-dissolution. So far from experiencing a sense of exaltation, he feels his individual life to be crumbling into nothingness.



He is humbled to the dust, bowed down by the perception of human insignificance, appalled by the majesty of that power before which men are as grasshoppers. He feels that this dread power has taken possession of him, but he feels at the same time that he has no glory in the fact; he is a mere passive instrument, blown upon by the winds of heaven. The sense of his secret makes him solitary. He goes forth from the haunts of men, and on the mountain, in the desert, and in the cave he spends long days alone. He becomes subject to fits of epilepsy, he is assailed by paroxysms of nervous excitement, his frame is shaken by the force of the inward man. It is at this period that we get a glimpse of his portrait, clearly discernible through the page of twelve centuries. In that portrait there is a mixture of the imposing and the sad. We see the slightly curled black hair, the long dark eyelashes, the flowing beard, the form not without natural dignity, but attenuated by protracted solitude, by deep thought, by incessant brooding on his burden of responsibility; above all, the singular walk, in which the whole body moves simultaneously, as if descending the slope of a hill. The whole figure powerfully betokens a man in the moment of self-forgetfulness, his personality crushed by the weight of an idea, his mind dominated by the power of a single thought; he is bearing a burden of revelation too heavy for his individual strength.

If our picture of Mohammed be true, we must clearly exclude from our conception of his work all thought of conscious imposture. What leads us to believe that our picture is the truth, is the fact

that Mohammed endeavoured to impress upon his followers that very type of religious life which, in our judgment, was portrayed in himself. Religious teachers generally communicate to their disciples the result of their own experience ; in this consists their sole chance of success. When Mohammed taught his followers to humble themselves beneath the mighty power of God, he spoke in all probability what his own heart dictated, and what his own life had proved to be the source of great strength. And if this was the experience of Mohammed's heart, he must at the outset have stood at the opposite remove from imposture—as far removed from it as self-depreciation is distant from self-exaltation. There are, indeed, at the present day, few intelligent men who adhere to the old notion that this man was a conscious deceiver. It is at first sight more difficult to determine whether he was an unconscious one. That question can only be answered by a candid examination of his message. Was his message true or false ? is the preliminary inquiry to every discussion of Mohammed's motives, and it is precisely this inquiry which has not been approached in the proper spirit. The minds of men have come to it from two opposite sides, and have therefore looked at it with a polemical bias. To some, it has appeared that loyalty to the Christian faith demands a repudiation and denunciation of every doctrine contained in the Koran ; such commonly reject the Mohammedan message without inquiry. There are others, again, who look at the subject from the converse side. Affected towards Christianity with a negative im-

pulse, they welcome in Mohammedanism that marvellous rapidity of progress, that vast extent of sway, and that diffusion of intellectual culture, which seem to place it on a rival throne with the faith of Christendom. We object to both of these tendencies, because they are the product, not of scientific investigation, but of individual feeling. On the one hand, we have long ere now seen that truth is to be found in all systems, and the opposition of Mohammedanism to Christianity must not blind us to the fact. On the other hand, whatever truth we concede to the Koran must, we think, be conceded with divided honours.

It does not seem to us that we are entitled to rank Mohammedanism as an altogether independent religion. The spirit of Mohammedanism was really lit by the spirit of Christianity. It is not too much to say that, if the religion of Christ had never existed, the religion of Mohammed would never have been born. The Arabian prophet himself admitted the miraculous origin of the Christian faith. He recognised in Christ a supernatural birth and a second advent. He did not, indeed, admit His suffering, holding that, immediately before the cross, He was caught up to heaven; yet even this is not much inferior to the Christianity of certain Jewish sects in the early Church. We cannot, accordingly, give Mohammed or his teaching a place outside the Christian system, and we are not sure that his doctrines ought not to be treated rather as ecclesiastical heresies than as new fountains of error.

Let us see, then, what was this message which Mohammed felt himself impelled to deliver. It con-

tained a twofold proclamation : there is one God, and Mohammed is His apostle. The former of these has by the wisest men of all ages, been regarded as an absolute truth ; the doctrine of divine unity seems to be attested alike by the most advanced philosophy and the most matured science. Yet, when Mohammed appeared upon the scene, this unity of God was in danger of being forgotten. In Mecca itself there existed at the same time three forms of belief—Christianity, Judaism, and the native religion of the tribes. To these three, however, there was one element in common, the substitution of the image for the reality. Christianity and Judaism had alike approximated to the level of pagan worship, and were rapidly falling back upon the adoration of many gods. Into this scene of idolatry Mohammed came as an iconoclast. He proposed to sweep away the shadows which threatened to eclipse the sun, to break down the images which stood in the light of God. He professed to restore to the world the thought of divine unity, to reveal once more that absolute majesty of the Father which would admit of no equal and no second, but must ever stand alone in its solitary greatness. He declared his mission to be the dethroning of those usurpers that had sought to share God's sovereignty, the destruction of those idols which had denuded man of his birthright, and the restoration of the creature into direct fellowship with the Creator. Had Mohammed kept the latter part of the promise as strictly as he fulfilled the former, he would have anticipated the Reformation by many centuries ; unfortunately, it was just here that his efforts failed. In



the breaking of the images, in the destruction of the idols, in the sweeping away of all obstacles to the realization of God's unity, he was at one with the spirit of Luther—a true Protestant—a forerunner of the great Reformation. But all this was only the destructive side of Protestantism; it broke down, but it did not build up. Mohammed pointed the world to the solitary majesty of God, but he left it a solitary majesty; he did not bring the object of his reverence into union with the human soul. His very hatred to idolatry led him into an extreme on the other side. Abhorring human representations of God, he shrank from imputing to God a share in the life of humanity. There is no mediator in the Mohammedan's creed, no union of the human with the divine. The infinite Father whom he worships is infinitely removed from his creatures, and can only commune with them through the language of command. Man is little better than a piece of mechanism—nay, the nearer he approaches to that standard, the nearer he comes to his destiny; and he finds his highest goal only in absolute submission to a will he cannot resist, and may not try to comprehend. Mohammed's Protestantism, then, was, after all, but a negative creed, extending no farther than the removal of abuses; yet, so far as it went, it was real. We must not blame Mohammed for not being Luther; truth has its steps of development, and it seldom takes two steps at a time. Mohammed's mission was essentially negative, it was the removal of the hindrances to the perception of divine unity; and we cannot say that, up to the measure



of his destined work, he failed to fulfil the office of a prophet.

This brings us naturally to the second article of his creed, 'Mohammed is the Apostle of God.' It is quite certain that the Arabian prophet meant these words to be the proclamation of an absolute truth—a truth for all time ; it is equally certain that, by the light of subsequent history, he is proved to have been wrong. His religion still nominally stretches over 130,000,000 of souls—still nominally comprehends a vast geographical extent of the earth's surface. But even from its votaries the fervour of youth has departed, and the earnestness of the ancient belief exists no more. On the other hand, there is an outside world which has renewed its spring-time, and left Mohammedanism in the mists of winter ; the Cross has outgrown the Crescent. The deplorable position of the sick man in Europe at this hour is alone sufficient to attest how far the founder of the religion was mistaken when he believed himself to be the apostle of an absolute truth. But does it follow from this, that he had no relative mission to communicate to the world ? The world has outgrown the facts of his revelation. Does it follow that at no time these facts had a living power ? On the contrary, the very subsequent growth of Christendom was partially owing to that impulse which the early vigour of Mohammedanism imparted to its life. Mohammed entered upon the scene possessed by one idea, and that idea happened to be an absolute truth—the unity of God. He came precisely at the moment when that was, of all others, the most obscure, the most ready

to vanish away. He saw his countrymen bowing down to the works of their own hands, worshipping the creature more than the Creator, and, like the Christian apostle, who stood on the summit of Mars Hill, his spirit was stirred within him when he beheld the city wholly given to idolatry. He felt that this stirring of his spirit was a call to speak and a command to act; he heard in it the very voice of God, bidding him go forth to battle, and, as the truth to be proclaimed was vital, and as the instinct to proclaim it was right, we need not be afraid to concede to him the honour of a special place in history, nor to acknowledge that, to the age in which he lived, he was indeed an instrument in the hand of God.

And the proof of this mission was its long-continued success. There is a sense in which success is a real criterion of merit. No system could endure for an hour if there were not in it either a truth or the counterfeit of a truth; a religious creed can only live while it really supplies a want of mankind. Let us follow for a time the course of this religion. It did not at first promise to be a triumphal march. Mohammed was destined to experience the truth of that proverb, which has often been illustrated before and since, that 'a prophet has no honour in his own country.' He sought first to gather proselytes from the members of his own family, but in this he met with little success. In the course of three years he had made only seven converts, and the number of his enemies was daily augmenting. He found that a change of plan must be resorted to,

that the materialized natures of his countrymen must be assailed by rougher weapons than those of spiritual exhortation and moral persuasion. Accordingly, he fled from the city of his birth, and from that flight the Mohammedans date the beginning of that new world of thought which was about to dawn. Medina received him with open arms, and invested him with the rank of sovereign. And now the storm burst over the kingdoms of the earth. It appeared at first as a little cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, and Mohammed himself did not live to see it spread very far. He lived long enough, however, to inaugurate that career of material conquest, which never paused until the thrones and dynasties of three continents were shaken to their foundation. The march of these conquests is unparalleled in history.

From the moment the followers of the prophet took the sword into their hands, they swept down everything before them. He was not a century in his grave till his disciples had revolutionized the world. Arabia yielded to their arms, Syria bowed in submission, Persia succumbed to their overwhelming power, Egypt opened its gates to receive them, all North Africa did homage to the invaders. Spain was next made to feel the yoke, and there for centuries the Moorish power held undisputed sway. France only saved itself by a bloody and hard-won victory; and though it rolled back the wave, it did not lessen its inherent strength. The eastern empire of the Cæsars dragged out for a few centuries a precarious existence, and with armies

beaten and resources squandered, continued for a while to preserve the name of royalty; but at last, beneath the sword of the Musulman, even this passed away, and the Mohammedan power reached the climax of its splendour, when, within the walls of the very city of Constantine, the crescent gleamed from the spires of St. Sophia. It would fain have advanced further still, it made an effort to include Austria in the band of its tributaries, but before the gates of Vienna its proud course was stayed. From that time the tide of Mohammedanism has ebbed, and its waters have dried from off the civilised nations; but by that time its work had been fulfilled, and its prophecy had to yield to a clearer day.

In assuming the sword as a medium of conversion, Mohammedanism undoubtedly deserted the spirit of Christianity for the spirit of Judaism. Yet it does not explain the success of Mohammedanism, any more than it explains the success of Judaism, to say that it conquered by the sword. Behind such a solution the question must still remain, Why did the sword of these religions prove so victorious? In neither case was it aided by the force of numbers, nor the advantages of a military training; the Mohammedan and the Jew alike took the field in insignificant companies, and with slender resources. As they advanced in their march of triumph their companies indeed were swelled, and their resources multiplied; but this is only one of those points which itself requires explanation. It is, to our mind, perfectly clear that the explanation, in both cases, is to be sought in the same source; in that strength of vital



faith, which lent courage to the heart, and muscular energy to the arm; in that belief in a destined mission, which made them fearless in danger, steadfast in conflict, resigned in trial, calm in the hour of death, and, most of all, in that submission to an infinite will, which, in the absence of the Christian consciousness, was the nearest possible substitute for the self-surrender of the soul. We cannot therefore refer the power of Mohammedanism to purely material causes; we could not do so, even if its conquests had been purely material. But, in truth, the successes of war were the smallest part of that influence which the followers of the prophet exerted over the human race; to them belongs the honour of having rekindled the learning of Europe. At the outset of their career they set themselves in antagonism to the products of secular culture, but their minds were subdued by the nations whom they themselves had conquered. They invaded Egypt, and burned the Alexandrian Library, but their own intellectual nature seemed to have caught fire at the conflagration. From that hour a new life began for them—a life which, without superseding their course of outward victory, yet served to mitigate their fierceness, and assuage the violence of their passions—a life which certainly extended the limits of their empire into regions which, by the sword, they could never have penetrated. Great as were their triumphs in war, these sink into insignificance before the greatness of their intellectual achievements. There was not a science, there was not a branch of study, there was not a realm of thought which they did not



aspire to compass, and which they did not partially make their own. They studied the heavens, and though by the arts of astrology they imagined much in them that was not there, they discovered by pure observation much that modern research has confirmed. They contemplated the structure of the earth, and anticipated in great measure the future triumphs of Galileo, and Copernicus, and Newton. They investigated the origin of man, and some of them, rightly or wrongly, approached very near to the development theories of our nineteenth century. They interested themselves in natural history, at a season when the mass of mankind had directed little attention to the study of the lower creation. They pursued the knowledge of chemistry; and if they degraded its pursuit by transforming it into alchemy, they have yet left behind, amidst the dross, some grains of purest gold. They entered into the domain of botany, of physiology, especially of medicine. They might be called the first physicians of Europe. At a time when men sought to cure diseases by the touch of relics and the power of miracles, they investigated the laws of health, and pointed out to the world a more perfect way; to them the medical science owes a debt of deepest gratitude. Nor were the objects of their intellectual pursuit limited to the physical world. They were strong in two regions which are commonly, though erroneously, deemed antagonistic; the abstract and the concrete, philosophy and poetry. To the former they were directed by the speculative vigour of their own minds, to the latter they were attracted by the majestic aspects of

Oriental nature. In the works which they have transmitted to us, we discover that fine blending of the rational and the æsthetic, that union of the reflective and the creative, that meeting of the profound and the imaginative, which rounds the intellectual nature into perfect symmetry, and reveals the full balance of the mind: further than this the development of the intellect cannot go.

Yet it is not alone in war, in science, in philosophy, and in art that Mohammedanism merits our attention; it achieved something also for the practical life of man. As the followers of the prophet grew rich they became luxurious, and when men became luxurious they became mercantile. Mohammedanism is the parent of European commerce; it taught that principle of giving and receiving which constitutes the trade of nations. At first, indeed, their spirit of iconoclasm would have withheld them from all intercourse with other lands, but this spirit only lasted during the days of their poverty. As they grew in wealth they grew in liberality, and while their iconoclasm remained as a creed it gradually ceased as a practice. The more intellectual amongst them came eventually to adopt a religious standpoint not untinged with scepticism; their ideas became cosmopolitan, and they sought to escape from what was national both in creed and manners. And as in these lands the more intellectual were the rulers of public opinion, the mass of the people followed their example, even while they understood not their motives. The barriers of caste were broken down, and their merchants travelled from shore to shore, carrying the

perfumes of Arabia, and the sweeter perfume of Arabian civilisation. Such commercial intercourse could not do otherwise than exert an expansive influence both on their own minds and on the minds of those with whom they traded. The exchange of commodities was the smallest part of the traffic; there was the mutual impartation of national gifts. The East had to give to the West the impulse of its intellectual force; the West had also a possession which it could offer in return. That possession was the spirit of Christian helpfulness.

Christianity, by the verdict even of its adversaries, has stood alone amongst religions as a power of benevolence. The history of charities may be almost said to begin with the first manifestations of the Christian faith; and from the day when the new religion broke the bread amongst the multitude, it has never paused in its tendency to impart secular help to the fainting and the weary. We have seen that paganism failed here, and we have seen the reason of its failure; it deified those who had need of nothing. Mohammedanism, in this respect, presented at the outset some contact to paganism; its martial spirit, its contempt of death, its efforts after blind submission to the mandates of an infinite will, all tended to dwarf its estimate of the wants of man. But in process of time Mohammedanism travelled into Western Europe, and Western Europe, with its enterprising monastic institutions, was already the home of the charities. Here the Crescent received a glow from the Cross. As the religion of the prophet had caught the fire of Egyptian learning,

it now caught the light of Christian charity. And, strangely enough, it so happened that a defect in the views of mediæval Christendom had left open and untenanted one of its own peculiar spheres. Amongst the many who ought to have enlisted the sympathies of mankind, there was one class, and that the most unfortunate of all, for whom the early Church had made no provision; we allude to the insane. The omission was not an overlook; it originated in a theological prejudice. Those who had been bereft of reason were regarded by the Church as under the influence of diabolical possession, and were therefore the objects rather of repulsion than of sympathy. With Mohammedanism, on the other hand, it was all the reverse. Perhaps in most of its forms insanity originates in the possession of the mind by one exclusive idea; a fanatic is considered allied to madness, and a fanatic is simply a man occupied with one overwhelming thought.

Now such a man was Mohammed; he was a fanatic—what the world would call a madman. He was possessed by a single idea; it was not in itself a false idea, but by its claim to exclusive empire it disturbed the balance of his nature: this itself was a species of insanity. Hence that which to the Christian was a source of repulsion, became to the Mohammedan an object of great attraction; the association of ideas made all the difference. To the Christian Church all forms of mental aberration were forms of diabolical influence; to the followers of the prophet they were the indications and the evidences of a soul imbued with inspiration from on high. The disciple strove

to be as his master, and envied those who had succeeded in arriving at his mental absorption. In those cases where mental aberration passed into hopeless lunacy, the followers of the prophet felt especially interested, and in behalf of those all the best instincts of their nature were enlisted. They looked upon them as God-intoxicated men—men who had received so much of the heavenly light that the earthly light had been cast into the shade. They saw in them lives which had been incapacitated for this world by over-much inspiration of the world to come, and they felt themselves imperatively called to provide for these martyrs of their religion. It is to this feeling of the Eastern mind that Europe is indebted for its first lunatic asylums; to Mohammedan charity, stimulated by Mohammedan faith, we owe these benevolent institutions. The reason of the Musulman for founding them was as bad as the reason of the Christian for refraining to found them; but this is only one more of the many instances in which evil has wrought out the ends of good, and truth has been advanced by the temporary belief in error. The glory of Mohammedanism has passed away; its conquests have been transferred to other hands, its battles have been forgotten, its learning and civilisation have become the possession of its enemies; but in this good work for the benighted soul, in this provision of a home for those who have lost the light of reason, there will ever remain a monument to its memory, whereby even in its death-hour it still may speak to us.

We have now briefly, yet we hope not unfairly,



considered the relation of Mohammedanism to the development of the world. That its influence has been vast, it would be impossible to deny; that it conferred great benefits both upon its own and upon subsequent ages, is a matter of observation and experience; that it came into the world with a destined mission, and held an appointed place in the history of mankind, is, in the light of that history, scarcely to be questioned. Yet we must repeat what we have already said, that Mohammedanism cannot bear an undivided honour. Great as was the impulse it imparted to European civilisation, it originally derived that impulse from a source higher than itself—from a Christianity which was once the spirit of freedom, of intellect, and of power. To that Christianity, in its season of worldly corruption, it came to give back somewhat of that early freshness which had once made it so glorious; the Crescent sought to restore to the Cross that vigour which at first it had lent to the Eastern world. How much the Crescent found in which the Cross could respond to it, how powerfully the prophet's religion was to stimulate the heart of Christendom, how rapidly the breath of Eastern Protestantism was to permeate and vivify the soul of Europe, we shall, in the immediately succeeding pages, be able to see.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### FIRST REVOLT OF THE SCHOOL-LIFE.

AT the time when Mohammedanism had become a formidable military power, the use of images was general throughout the Christian Church, and the idea of image representation was obtaining a more definite form, from the introduction of statues into places of worship. This transition from the simple relic into the employment of elaborate sculpture had, of course, an æsthetic importance of its own; it formed another of those stages of appropriation by which the spirit of Christianity united itself with human art. It is, however, with the religious aspect of the subject that we are here concerned, and, seen in this light, it marks the increase of formalism. As long as the image was designed to be merely suggestive of an invisible presence, the simplicity of its form was a positive advantage. But as the sense of the invisible receded, the image became necessary for its own sake. Hitherto it had possessed a borrowed glory—a glory which could not be dimmed by any absence of adornment in itself; but when the borrowed glory departed, it was essential that it should receive such outward embellishment as might supply the blank. The elaboration of imagery in the

Church of mediævalism pointed indubitably to the conquest of matter over mind. That Church was rapidly forgetting the thought in the symbol. It is a danger to which all school-life is subject; a danger which would infallibly arrest the development of every mind, if it were not from time to time counteracted by disturbing influences. To the Church of mediævalism one of these influences had already come.

Mohammedanism had kindled in the heart of Asia a fire against idolatry, and Europe caught the fire. The first region ignited by the spark was Greece. One is naturally apt to ask, why this country should have taken the precedence of all others in the reaction against ecclesiasticism, why the empire of the East, rather than the kingdoms of the West, should have begun the war with images? It is not difficult, indeed, to account for the contact of the Greek Empire with Mohammedanism. It felt that contact to its cost; its armies were beaten, its standards trampled in the dust, its very capital all but surrendered. One would have thought, however, that such a meeting of Europe and Asia would have exercised on both rather a repulsive than an attractive influence, and that, to the Grecian mind, the religion of the prophet would have been rendered doubly odious by its association with national enmity. Instead of this, it is indisputable that Mohammedanism extended direct favour to many portions of the Greek Church, and that the Greek Church adopted as its watchword that denunciation of the use of images, which formed the leading feature of the

Mohammedan reformation. The fact is curious, and worth studying; it is one of the many circumstances that serve to prove the existence of a unity in nations, underlying all their diversities; and we shall not think it altogether lost labour to pause for a moment, and inquire into the reason of this strange phenomenon.

More than one explanation has been suggested to account for the image-breaking tendency of the Greek mind. It has been said that the mind of Greece was all along peculiarly abstract, and therefore more in sympathy with thoughts than with forms. We doubt this very much. We fail to discover any evidence that Greece, as a nation, leant towards the abstract. The Platonist certainly did; but the Platonist was only one, even amongst the philosophers. The Epicuræan confined himself to the forms of nature, and the Stoic worshipped as his deity that principle of life which he believed to reside in matter. The philosophy of Greece tended, as a whole, rather to the concrete than to the abstract, rather to materialism than to mysticism. And what shall we say of its poetry? Perhaps in no region of the world has the poetic faculty been so strongly associated with visible representation; it is all form, all colour, all outward action. It deals not with virtues, but with virtuous deeds; not with vices, but with crimes; not with principles, but with practices. Its heroes are not the types of universal man, but the types of Grecian men. Divest them of their armour, strip them of their costume, dissociate them from their patriotism, deprive them of their nationality,

and they cease to be. With such a predilection for the outward form, we shall find it difficult to conclude that the opposition of the Greek Church to images originated in its abstract character.

A second reason is suggested by Dean Stanley, in his *History of the Eastern Church*. He tells us that the mind of Eastern Christendom was pre-eminently conservative; clinging to the old and resisting the new; that the use of images, being an after-thought, was regarded as an innovation, and therefore opposed with all the force of the Greek intellect. There is certainly a truth in this; yet, if we mistake not, there is required another truth to supplement it before we can reach the explanation. That the Eastern mind was conservative is undoubtedly true; but it was conservative in a very peculiar sense. Conservatism may be roughly defined to be the tendency to adhere to the institutions of the past. In nearly all nations, the institutions of the past are less free than those of the present; liberty commonly grows with time, and hence we generally associate the conservative with the man who opposes liberal views. But in Greece it was all the reverse; the institutions of the past were more free than those of the present. Paradoxical as it may seem, the Greek was a conservative only because he was a liberal. His past had fallen upon those golden days in which freedom was the possession of his nation. Even his first association with Christianity had been that of liberty. Though his national independence had ceased ere the advent of the Cross, though the sceptre had passed from his hands into those of imperial Rome, he still retained the spirit of



liberty in the appropriation of the thoughts of others. When he received Christianity, he received it after his own manner; not as a formal creed; not as a mechanical system; not as the artificial arrangement of a series of dogmatic statements, but as a fresh, young, buoyant life, big with possibilities, and strong with intense impulses. He received it not as a religion to be squared down to the rules of reason, but as a faith which was to permeate his whole nature; to quicken his imagination, to increase his poetic fire, to beautify his conceptions of art and nature; to lend new energy to his individual will; to make him a better, freer, nobler citizen of his country. That was the spirit in which the East of Europe had first embraced Christianity, and until the Byzantine despotism extinguished the last spark of national warmth, that spirit did not wholly die. If in its declining years it presented itself in the form of conservatism, it was because, by that time, its past alone was free, and all its present glory lay in the remembrance of its past. The march of ages was the march of its bondage; the innovations of time were only new rivets in its chain, and it sought in retrospect that light of liberty which had faded for ever from the passing hour.

This, then, was the real point of contact between the Arab and the Greek. They sought to retrace their steps out of the artificial into the natural; to regain that primitive simplicity which had imparted to their worship its early charm. The movement in the Christian Church was a revolt of the school-life, an attempt to get back into the spontaneity of child-

hood, where it could feel the power of objects without being forced to analyze them. Thus far this first Protestant impulse of mediæval Christendom was in harmony with all Protestantism. Every reformation movement plants one foot upon the past ; if it broke with the past it would be a re-creation, not a reformation. Protestantism in its full development certainly professed to be a progressive movement, but it held its highest glory to be the fact that it was regressive ; that it had gone back in order to come forward ; that in starting upon its path of manhood it had taken its departure from the pure instincts of earliest years. Greece, too, had its foot upon the past, and struggled to return. Why its efforts proved abortive ; why its struggles ended in failure ; why its last wave of freedom subsided into a sea of stagnant waters, we shall soon enough come to see. In the meantime, there are features of this Greek Protestantism which should not altogether be left unnoticed ; unimportant in themselves, they point to the germs of great principles, and, though insignificant in their immediate influence, they are prophetic of mightier and more lasting effects.

First of all, it is worthy of remark, that the revolt of the Eastern Church against images is the earliest protest of the laity against ecclesiastical abuses. Hitherto the schisms within the Church had originated in the disputes of presbyter with presbyter, presbyter with bishop, and bishop with Roman bishop. From the days of Tertullian, the clergy had begun to view themselves as a privileged caste, and to separate their interests from those of the laity.

One by one, as the centuries advanced, those possessions which had been common to both, had been withdrawn from the latter, while the ever increasing prevalence of priestly celibacy widened more and more the distance between the Church and the world. The laity, dispossessed of their interest in ecclesiastical matters, experienced for a time that sense of religious apathy which is the prelude to moral death, and Christianity was in danger of becoming the exclusive property of the monastic and hierarchical orders. But when Mohammedanism struck a light in Europe, it was the lay element that it kindled into flame. As its impulse came from a region outside the Church, it made the greatest impression upon that part of Christendom farthest removed from the ecclesiastical centre. The laity had always been compelled to stand in the outer court of the tabernacle—had ever been denied an entrance into the holiest of all. The Church had professed to consider them its members, but they felt themselves to be only its slaves. They had been commanded to stand afar off, to admire the majestic structure, and bow down with reverence before it, but never to cross its threshold without an introduction from one of its sacred inmates. The bread they had been permitted to eat had been but the crumbs which had fallen from the master's table; the privileges they had been allowed to enjoy had been but the gifts of charity doled out by priestly hands. In all these years there had come to them from within the fold no prospect of elevation, no breath of freedom. But now it had come from without. There had blown a blast from the East, and

the Christian fabric was rocked by its fury ; the trees of the mediæval garden were being shaken, and those fruits which had promised to be eternal were falling thick and fast. And the laity of the Greek Church gloried in the storm. What had they ever reaped from the prevalence of these ecclesiastical institutions, that they should murmur at their ruin ? Had not these been the source of their degradation, the destroyers of their birthright ? Was not this the time to assert themselves, to claim and to maintain their lawful position ? The hour of emancipation had come, would they let it pass them by ? the day of reckoning had dawned, would they not contribute to make its balance just ? And they did contribute. Never, till eight centuries later, was such a scene to be witnessed in this world ; it only finds its parallel in the iconoclasm of Knox and the Scottish presbyterians. The laymen of the Eastern Church made no pretence of argument. They knew well enough, that whatever education existed belonged to the clergy, and that the clergy were their bitterest opponents. Therefore they did not try to reason ; they struck. They entered sword in hand into the sacred precincts, they broke the altars, they dashed in pieces the statues, they demolished the pictures, they scattered the relics to the winds, they offered death to all who opposed them. Their career was headlong, wild, impetuous, and tumultuary, without plan of attack and without order of advance ; they followed the impulse of the moment, and the impulse of the moment was destructive. There was at least as much of enmity as of religious zeal in their crusade ; there were elements



in it which remind us of the France of 1792, where the principle of human liberty was wedded to the thirst for the expiation of long oppression. But there was one great difference between the Paris of the eighteenth and the Constantinople of the eighth century. The modern secular revolution was a movement of the populace; the mediæval religious one was a movement *through* the populace: the former was radical to the core; the latter, apparently radical, was really not only conservative but aristocratic. That undisciplined rabble, rushing into the sacred edifices to indemnify themselves for past neglect, would have been scattered in an instant had they been the principals in the transaction; but these were only puppets: there was a power behind them pulling the strings. That power was nothing less than the Greek emperor himself.

Here appears the second distinctive feature of this early Protestant impulse. It was not merely religious, it was not merely actuated by personal enmities; it was the product of a political plan. Its birthplace was not the hamlet, but the palace; it came not from the people, but from the throne. The Byzantine Empire had all along aimed at the supremacy of the civil over the ecclesiastical power; the Byzantine Church had all along been willing to acknowledge this supremacy. It was perhaps the most Erastian Church this world has ever seen; its patriarch was a creature of the emperor, and was well content to be nothing more. But in the West, the image-loving, ceremonial West, such principles had never been accepted. There existed there a church which already aimed at be-



coming an empire within the empire, and which was ere long to aim at making the empire a province within itself. An ambition so high, a life so fresh and strong, a purpose so inveterately pursued from age to age, all presented to the Byzantine emperor the aspect of a formidable barrier. It was to break down this barrier that he assailed the mediæval Church in its tenderest point. The images were the source of its veneration, and its veneration was the source of its strength, and its strength was the source of its danger; let him break the pitcher at the fountain, and the power would cease to flow. That was the motive for the crusade of Greek Protestantism—that at least was its originating motive; it was designed by political bias, and it sprang from the breath of kings.

It cannot surprise us, that a movement which, with all its advantages, was yet the fruit of such worldly motives, should have exhibited in history so chequered and so wavering a career. The course of this early Reformation displays a strange mixture of strength and weakness. The light which it kindled passed alternately through stages of glory and eclipse. During three consecutive reigns it burned unquenchably. It rose with Leo the Isaurian, it brightened with Constantine Copronymus, with Leo IV. it arrived at its meridian. Then came the Empress Irene. With an instinct not unnatural to the female heart, she could not love an abstraction, she must see the object of her reverence embodied in a material form; and so the laity were repressed, and the sun of Protestantism went down. A political

revolution revived it; Irene was deposed, and Nicephorus reigned in her stead; again the images were broken and the temples purified. Nicephorus passed away, and there followed another eclipse of two years' duration. Then, for the last time, the light of Greek Protestantism flashed out, and after diffusing itself through the reigns of three successive emperors, it was extinguished by the hand of Theodora, in a torrent of blood and tears. Such was the orbitless nature of a course which might have been a pathway of perpetual light; yet it is not difficult to discover the reason of its want of power. No Irene, no Theodora could have quenched that light, if it had contained within itself the elements of permanence. But it did not contain these elements. Its mission was only to reflect abuses, not to reveal positive glories. It awakened the mediæval world to the knowledge that it had shut out the sunshine, but it did not help the mediæval world to bring the sunshine back again. To drop all metaphor, Greek Protestantism failed to be a reformation, because it failed to be constructive. It broke down the idols with an unsparing hand, but it forgot that to destroy is only half the work of a reformer. It forbade the worship of the past, but it did not supply the blank by instituting a worship for the future. It declared the reverence of the image to be worthy of death, but it did not point out to the world what course would be worthy of life. Therefore, when its mission of destruction was completed, its work was done; it had no edifice to rear in the room of that temple which it had demolished; and when the demolition

had lost its last sphere of labour, there was nothing left for the movement but itself to die.

Yet, ere this first gleam of mediæval liberty subsided, the North of Europe had already caught the glow. There is a spiritual contagion alike in good and evil, and no strong national impulse can be limited to itself. Every great movement in any land must come forth from its nationality and become cosmopolitan. So was it with this Protestant impulse of the Greek Church; while yet in the glory of its strength, it stirred up influences beyond its native shore. It naturally presented most contact with the nations of a kindred nature and origin. There are two countries which, according to general tradition, have always been supposed to have sprung from an Eastern soil; we mean France and Britain. The Briton and the Gaul had probably alike their home in the same region as that Church which was now disturbing mediæval Europe. It is true, the Briton and the Gaul were no longer the representatives of their respective nations; they had both become Germanized—the one by the Saxon, and the other by the Frank. Yet the Saxon and the Frank, though they sprang from a different lineage, presented to the tribes whom they conquered a singular affinity of spirit. They had all the Protestant tendency of the East, and, in addition to that, they had a gift which the East did not possess; the Greek intellect could destroy, the German could not only destroy but rebuild. There was here a faculty of reconstruction waiting to be exercised—a faculty as yet, indeed, only in its infancy, but pointing prophetically to a

great future. The Anglo-Saxon was at no time so prone to image-reverence as most of the European nations; the Frank was at one time diametrically opposed to such reverence. Yet neither the Anglo-Saxon nor the Frank was disposed to rest in a merely negative position. They could not, indeed, transcend the limits of their age; they could not overleap the natural laws of human development; they were only in their school-life, and therefore incapable of independent thought. Yet, unable as they were to bridge over that gulf which mediævalism had interposed between the human and the divine, they were not disposed to shrink before the thought of divinity into an attitude of abject terror. Unable to find an adequate expression of that thought in the worship of artificial images, they sought to find it in the actual forms of the visible creation. Fifty years after the opening of the Mohammedan epoch, we witness the birth of English poetry—a new shrine of art for the spirit of Christianity. That there was any conscious connection between the outburst of Mohammedan freedom and the outburst of British imagination, we do not for a moment believe, but there may be the deepest relation where there is no conscious connection; if there be a common life in humanity, we must expect to find a simultaneous movement in its members. The birth of English poetry presents this analogy to the rise of Mohammedanism, that it too was a revolution—a revolt of the school-life against the conventions of the school. Hitherto the mediæval intellect had simply accepted what it had been told, not only without questioning, but without an attempt



at realization. English poetry did not venture to question, but it made a powerful effort to realize. That this literary renaissance should have taken religion for its subject, that in an age when the holy of holies was shut to the laity, it should have aspired to represent those truths which had been hitherto the property of the priest alone, this was itself an act of marvellous daring. Yet this was precisely what the British renaissance did ; its poetry began with religion. The first of the Anglo-Saxon bards was Cædmon. He was a man of the people, and he sang for the people. Coming from the ranks of the populace, he brought to the study of his art no ornaments of culture or of learning, he brought to it only the impulse of native genius. There were two books open to him out of which he could select his materials—the book of nature and the record of sacred history. The teaching of these two volumes he wove into one texture, in his poem on the creation of the world. It was the marriage of religion and poetry, the union of sacred history with all that is beautiful in the natural world. For long centuries after, the religious poetry of England continued to flow from the people, and who shall say that it did not prepare them for their great destiny ? If, in the fulness of time, the Government of England was to be a popular Government,—a legislature in which the laws were to come from the mass of the community,—it was surely of inestimable importance that the mass should be leavened with the spirit of pure religion. To accomplish such a task, it was essential that the work should be early begun ; and in order to be early begun, it must be



simply instituted. What medium so simple as that of poetic representation? What form so fitted to reveal the Christian spirit to the intelligence of a rude, uncultured age? The rudeness and the unculturedness were not in themselves unfavourable to the poetic fire; they harmonized at least with the wilder aspects of nature, and, in any case, they were better than stagnancy. On the other hand, the religious impressions which the poetic fire was commissioned to convey were certain, sooner or later, to elevate and to refine. The birth of English poetry in the cottages of the poor, and the blending of that poetry with the objects of religious reverence, formed, in our view, the first step of that ascending ladder by which the social life of Britain has climbed to its eminence of political and religious freedom.

Within ten years after the appearance of Cædmon, there was born in Durham a man whose name has survived not only the dissolution of the Saxon dynasty, but all the political changes that since have intervened; we mean the Venerable Bede. His mission was to prolong the literary renaissance of England, and to add to the spirit of Christianity new intellectual shrines. His life lay far apart from the busy haunts of men. In early youth he entered the monastery of Jarrow; he was a deacon at nineteen, and a presbyter at thirty. It was not, however, on ecclesiastical promotion that his mind was bent; it was on the study of his religion. Accordingly, his life was a hidden life, working out its end in silence and in solitude. Without there was a great tumult; wars and rumours of wars harassed the length and

breadth of the land. The seven kingdoms of Saxon England strove fiercely for the mastery. Within this little spot of earth, nation had risen against nation, and men who owned a common brotherhood had ranged themselves as the citizens of rival and contending states. Violence, rapine, and bloodshed had permeated every corner of the soil, and all the passions of the human heart had yielded to the power of mutual hatred. But Bede listened not to the voices of the angry crowd; he turned his eyes inward upon the world of his own soul, and his silent contemplation was more powerful than the thunder, the earthquake, and the fire. The subject on which his thoughts centred was the history of the Church of England, from the days when Augustine landed on its shores, to the days on which his own life had fallen. It was a brief time to look back upon, and a season unmarked by events of much interest to the world. But the fact that this man should have set himself to write the history of his native church is alone suggestive; it bespeaks the rise of that spirit of patriotism which creates and preserves the spirit of national liberty, and is the best secular protection which a nation can possess against tyrannical usurpation and ecclesiastical oppression. By and by the Venerable Bede engaged in a work more suggestive still. He had lived to see the great effort of Greek Protestantism to break the idols and restore the sense of the unity of God; he had lived to see that effort apparently crowned with a success which no change of time and no combination of circumstances would be able to nullify; the images had been

broken, and they appeared to be broken for ever. It was now that good men in every land began to contemplate the possibility of restoring the direct study of the written word, of substituting the substance for the shadow. Bede, in the monastery of Jarrow, took up the pen of the commentator. His design was to interpret to his own people the direct utterances of Scripture—to enable them to read it in the language of their native country. It was perhaps in harmony with his own placid nature that the calm benignity of the fourth Gospel first presented itself to his view. His work was a labour of love, and he began by interpreting the message of the apostle of love. In the translation of that Gospel he spent his closing days, and he completed his noble effort only a few minutes before the end.

But the outburst of literary fervour was not to pass away with individual men; just as the old life went out, a new life came in. That very year in which Bede died Alcuin was born, and in him the renaissance was to be carried on beyond the limits of the century, and beyond the boundaries of the land. His name is less illustrious than that of Bede; posterity has not honoured him with the title of Venerable. His acquirements were rather those to be admired than to be revered; he is more remarkable for what he did than for what he was. Inferior to Bede as a man, he was greater as a scholar; destined to enjoy a less degree of personal fame, he was to accomplish a work whose fame was to endure long after his own memory had grown dim in the mists of time. That work was nothing

less than the civilisation of a great country ; the life of Alcuin is the first intellectual bridge that crosses the English Channel, and connects the mind of Britain with the spirit of the Continent. This was the man who was to carry into France the life of that renaissance which had dawned in England, and to plant in that kingdom the seeds of intellectual greatness. For this work his whole life was a preparation. As master of the school of York, he acquired the powers of a preceptor, and fitted himself for that position which is of all others the hardest to attain ; the claim to be reckoned a lucid expositor of truth. Unlike Bede, his studies were not concentrated around a single focus ; they embraced every department. Philosophy, mathematics, rhetoric, poetry, philology, and the science of religion were alike included in his sphere of contemplation. He, too, like Bede, had a reverence for the direct portraiture of the written word, and his commentary on the Apocalypse shows that he deemed the study of Scripture essential for the people ; but religious truth was with him only one of the many mansions which compose the structure of the human edifice. The subjects of his investigation were therefore vast and miscellaneous ; and though in this he had no other motive than the satisfaction of his natural bent of mind, it proved in the sequel well for himself and for his generation. For it so happened, that at this moment there was struggling into spiritual life an empire already physically great—an empire which had well-nigh conquered the material world of Europe, and was now eager to become master of the



world of civilisation too. The existence of such a desire alone demonstrated the presence of a latent force which yet would issue in a mighty spiritual power. To sit down and weep that we have not a mental as well as a material sphere to subjugate, indicates a higher cast of mind than that of the Macedonian hero; and we shall pause for a few moments to consider the circumstances of that great kingdom which, amidst its outward splendour, was yet so healthily conscious of its spiritual poverty.

That awakening of freedom, which in Greece took the form of a religious revival, had assumed in France the aspect of a political revolution. The Merovingian dynasty, which had received its glory from the renown of Clovis, had long been hastening to decay. It was no longer able to meet the exigencies of an age which was essentially a period of transition; it had risen out of the life of the barbarians, but it paled before the light of a clearer day. Accordingly, while the Greek empire was breaking with the religious past, France broke with the political institutions of its earliest years. Pepin, mayor of the palace, having obtained the concurrence of the Bishop of Rome, and having thus added the weight of religious authority to the influence of material strength, swept the old dynasty from the throne by a bloodless revolution, and became the founder of a new line of kings. He bequeathed the empire at his death to his son Charlemagne — a name which has become indissolubly associated with the glory of mediæval days. He was pre-eminently the man of the age, and therefore the age received



him as its representative. The history of his reign is the history of a long march of triumphs; nor can we wonder that it should have been so. His life united two periods of human development; he held one foot on the past, and the other on the future. He had all the fire of the barbarian; all the fierceness, the courage, sometimes even the cruelty, which are so distinctive of the period that immediately followed the decline of Rome. But he had also qualities which were rather prophetic than retrospective. He had perceptions of a mode of conquest higher than that of war, and more complete than that of bloodshed; of a kingdom which should subjugate, not the bodies, but the minds of men. He felt that the goal of European Christendom must be the attainment of civilisation, culture, refinement, and that such a goal must be attained through other paths than those of material conquest. The life of Charlemagne thus pointed onward as well as backward, and by its provision for the future it preserved the acquisitions of the past. And these acquisitions were indeed vast. Before the eighth century closed there was exhibited to Europe the spectacle of an empire which had gathered into itself nearly every region of the Continent. It comprehended France, it stretched over the Pyrenees into Spain, it embraced Germany, it included Hungary, it ranged over Italy, it held the kingdom of the Lombards; the power of the Teuton had almost monopolized the European West. Never again was it destined to become so formidable, until those days of the Lutheran Reformation, when Charles v. sat on the German

throne. Between Charlemagne and Charles v., separated as they are by long centuries, and divided as they are by different orders of civilisation, it has always seemed to us that there exists a strong parallel; in many respects they ought to stand side by side. Both lived in periods of transition, both ruled over a vast extent of territory, both displayed in their government those talents which mark them out as at once the leading warriors and the leading statesmen of their age, both exhibited in their moral life qualities in strange contradiction; revealing sometimes the highest generosity, and at others the most ungenerous severity; both at one period seemed to promise that they would hold out a helping hand to that incipient Protestant movement which in each of their reigns agitated Europe, and both miserably resiled from their positions, and fell back upon the elements of an older day. When we come to estimate the amount of their relative influence over Europe, we must confess that that of the later sovereign has been the more permanent, yet that of the earlier merits the higher praise. Charles v. came upon the scene long after the revival of letters had revealed its dawn, and therefore he was in some measure the follower of his times. Charlemagne had to create the greater part of that culture which he felt the world waited for, and therefore he was pre-eminently a leader of the minds of men. If the culture which he generated has passed away, it has passed only as the light of the planets passes into the light of the sun; it has been taken up into higher forms, and therefore its original form has been for-

gotten by the world; yet, in so far as the act of origination is higher than the act of embellishment, the work of Charlemagne is higher than the work of his illustrious successor.

It was when his military power was at the height of its glory that Charlemagne invited Alcuin from the shores of Britain, to become the intellectual regenerator of himself and of his kingdom. Like the majority of his age, he was himself illiterate; unlike the majority of his age, he knew and deplored it; he desired, therefore, that before Alcuin should become the teacher of his country, he should first be the preceptor of himself. Accordingly, the first secular school established in France was one attached to the royal palace; it was called the *Schola Palatina*. It was a singularly happy suggestion which placed the earliest institution of this sort in the very vicinity of the imperial court. It was not merely that an educated sovereign was better able to secure an educated people; its chief advantage was the force of example. The mass of the people commonly take their tone from the Court; if the Court be barbarous, barbarity becomes the fashion; if the Court be refined, a demand throughout the country is created for refinement. It was so with the people of Charlemagne; they desired to possess that which, as yet, they did not understand. They desired it, not for its own sake, but on account of an adventitious glory which had accrued to it; learning had become the property of kings, and therefore it was worth possessing. Yet, in this respect, the French

people were in no wise inferior to every individual man in his first approach to knowledge. Knowledge is undoubtedly worth possessing in itself, but its recipient can only learn that fact when he has come into its possession; and he must clearly be tempted to the goal by motives outside its inherent value. The association of learning with the high places of the land was to the people of Charlemagne what the promise of a gold medal is to the individual schoolboy; a temptation to the paths of science, an incentive to make trial of that of which he has as yet no experience. The result of this incentive was soon apparent. Schools multiplied rapidly; intelligence expanded day by day; all became emulous of entering on the new life. In process of time the original association was forgotten, and knowledge began to be desired for its own sake alone; the ladder was dropped when the height was gained. Those who but a generation ago had been almost barbarians, received the first impressions of culture and refinement almost in the transition of a moment. The learning which would have taken centuries to spread from the hamlet to the palace, was able in less than one to descend from the palace to the hamlet; and France obtained, as a nation, that thirst for intellectual freedom which it has stedfastly preserved through all the changing years.

And now there occurred one of those singular incidents which are ever confirming the historian in the faith, that the history of humanity is the

history of a connected life. France had received from England the first spark of its intellectual fire; France was to give back to England the warm glow of its developed flame. There came to the Court of Charlemagne an exile from the shores of Britain, a youth of talents and of promise, but as yet without possessions; it was Egbert, heir to the kingdom of Kent, and destined ultimately to be sovereign of united England. His exile, seemingly a misfortune, was really a great gain. In the French Court he learned what he never could have learned in the Saxon Heptarchy—the power of civilisation. He became refined by his contact with the educated, and he felt that the refinement was a seed worth planting in his native soil. That design was favoured by all the winds of fortune. In a few years Egbert went back to mingle with his countrymen, and his star rose higher every day. One by one the kingdoms of the Heptarchy fell down before him, until at last he stood alone, the undisputed founder of the English line. When he had reached that eminence, he bent down and sowed the seed—planted in the heart of the British nation those germs of culture which he had gathered from the kindling life of the Continent, and which in a few years burst out in so resplendent a harvest with the life of his grandson, the great Alfred.

We have thus traced the history of Christianity up to the first awakening of the mediæval intellect. It now becomes natural to ask, What relation was this intellectual revival to bear to its spiritual life?



It is perfectly clear that these efforts of mediæval intelligence had their root in a revolt from that school-life which the Church had instituted; they were really an attempt to institute a rival school, in which reason, and not authority, should be the arbiter of truth. The fruits of this design actually appeared in the England of the next generation. The British intellect, which was then identical with the German intellect, early began to manifest a restlessness of restraint, which promised to outstep the limits of Protestantism. In the period intermediate between Egbert and Alfred, we are startled by an anticipation of that transcendental philosophy which permeated so powerfully the atmosphere of our opening nineteenth century. Two men living in the far past are heard to strike a key-note, which was to be re-echoed after long years; the one an idealist, merging all objects in the thought of soul; the other a reconciler, seeking to mediate between the world without and the world within; the one the forerunner of Fichte, the other the precursor of Hegel; the one was Macarius, the other was John Scotus Erigena.

In France, the tendency towards religious independence had not, indeed, assumed so pronounced a form; but even here, it seemed as if the days of ecclesiasticism would be brought to a close. There were two respects in which the mind of Charlemagne was in unison with the Protestant spirit. He shared in the Greek aversion to the worship of images; and even after the second Nicene Council

had approved them, he summoned a Council at Frankfort, which affirmed the opposite view. In addition to this negative Protestantism, Charlemagne had imbibed the utmost reverence for the direct teaching of Scripture, and this seemed to furnish a positive ground of variance with the growing ecclesiastical spirit. Yet, if we examine this creed of Charlemagne a little more closely, we shall find how slender was that basis on which his reverence was built. He valued the Scriptures because he believed them to be the repositories of all the arts and sciences; they were not an end in themselves, but only the means to an end. Charlemagne was, after all, the child of the renaissance. What he esteemed above everything else was culture; and he esteemed religion because it tended to promote culture. The Utopia on which his eyes were bent was a world of art, of science, of civilisation, of political order and social refinement; he believed that the Scriptures contained the germs of these, and he valued the sacred for the sake of the secular. His Protestantism was only Lutheran on the negative side. He wanted liberty to range over the fields of thought; he desired to break down those barriers which would impede his progress, but he had no other boundaries to propose in their room, and the search for truth must be conducted within boundaries. No mind can proceed upon its journey absolutely void of all impressions; it must have certain positive principles by which to direct its

way. To make a stand for freedom, be it political, religious, or social freedom, is ever laudable, but freedom ought not to be its own end. We esteem liberty, not because it leaves the mind in a state of vacancy, but because it leaves it free to follow a definite course, to act out a settled plan; if there be no such course defined, if there be no such plan projected, the mere absence of outward restraint will be of little service. France, in the days of Charlemagne, desired religious freedom, and by religious freedom it meant the loosing of old bonds. To loose the bonds of the past, as a preliminary step, was well, but to untie the old without binding the new was indeed a questionable gain. In any case, it must have proved short-lived and perishable. Mere image-breaking never raised a new religion; the very process of iconoclasm, unless it be followed up by reconstruction, produces a reactionary effect on the mind of the destroyer.

The reformation of Charlemagne, in so far as it was religious, was negative; and because it was negative, it could not be permanent. It could not have been permanent, even though it had encountered no obstacle, and met with no foe; but a powerful obstacle was already at the door. For, while the world had been thus advancing in its career of secular progress, a power was following in the rear — a power neither sacred nor temporal, but partaking the defects of both, and seeking to compass both in its all-embracing sway. It had almost overtaken the Church, it was rapidly making

up to the world, and the slightest assistance from either Church or world was certain to complete its triumph. That assistance was to come from a quarter the least to be expected ; it was to be given by that French empire which had but recently entered on the path of liberty, and by that very sovereign whose opening life had promised to lend a champion to the ranks of religious reform.

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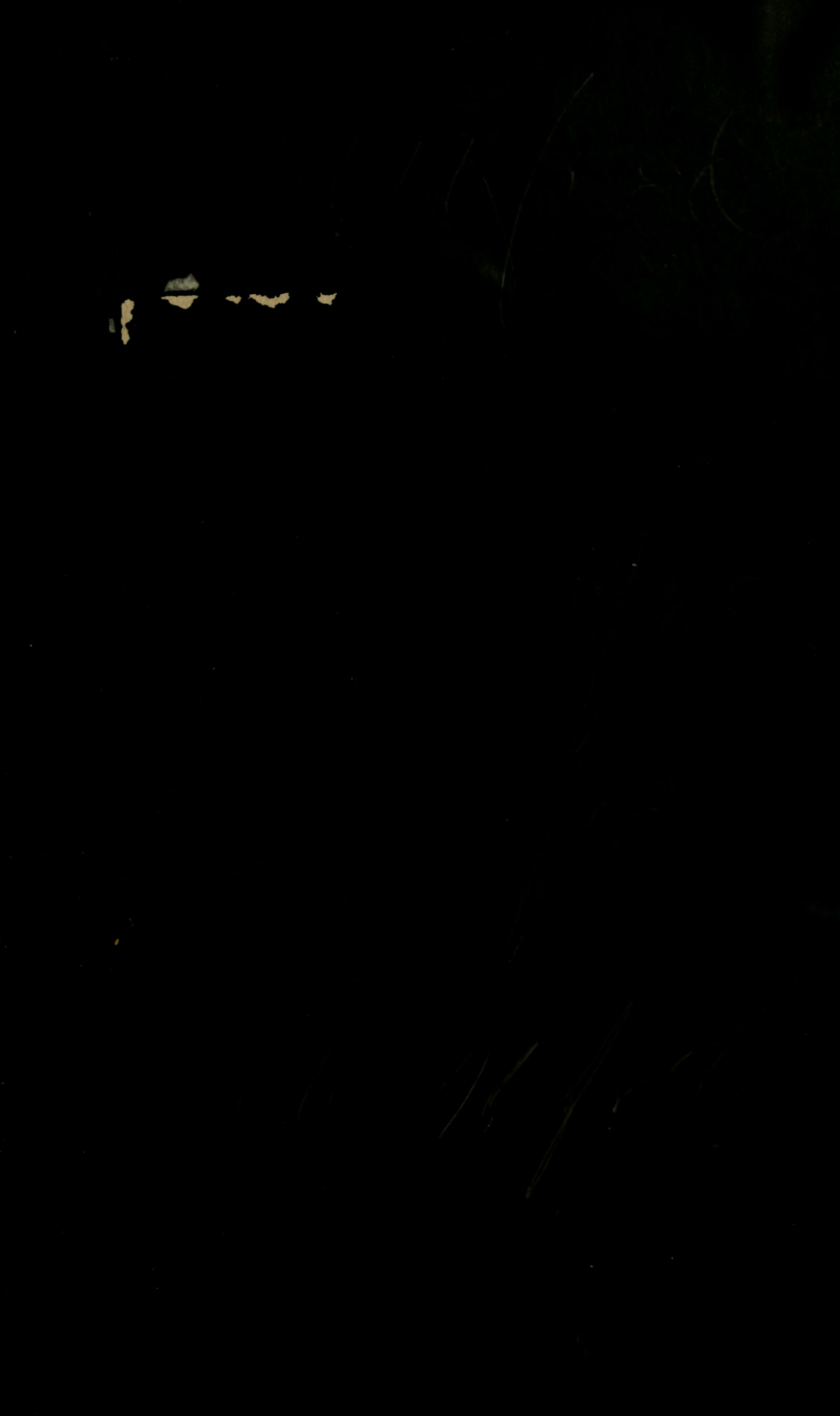




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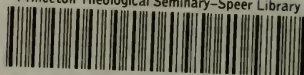
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